



PHD

**Community-Economic Initiatives: The Psychology and Organisation of Grassroots Sustainability**

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**Community-Economic Initiatives:**

**The Psychology and Organisation of Grassroots**

**Sustainability**

**Carmen Jayne Smith**

**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**Environment, Energy and Resilience**

**Department of Psychology**

**University of Bath**

**September 2016**

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## Abstract

Ecovillages, Timebanks and a Local Exchange Trading Schemes are part of global social movements as well as offering innovative approaches to local sustainability. The current study looks at these three community-economic initiatives as a means of addressing the connected social, economic and environmental challenges of local sustainable development. Investigating these collective practices builds on current approaches to studying pro-environmental behaviour change in the social sciences. Two research questions structured this investigation. These focussed on i) how members understand their experiences within the selected groups and ii) processes leading to the formation, maintenance and contraction of the initiatives.

Five individuals were interviewed from each group and interviews were analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. Secondary data sources also contributed to a broad analysis of group processes and contexts. Diverging from traditional approaches, this multi-level, interdisciplinary account is able to capture more of the complex reality of these organisations than would be possible within a single discipline or through focussing on a single element of group membership. Indeed this comprehensive approach to studying community-based models for sustainability is the unique contribution of this study, moving forward methodological debates in this field.

Findings that emerged from this study emphasise group members' motivation to enhance their personal resilience. Participation provided members with a sense of agency and community connection, as well as being a means to express alternative cultural identities. Informal reciprocal exchange was also preferred to more formal exchange practices, with implications for the understanding and development of community exchange systems. This study widens the focus of environmental psychology to include socio-economic practices, and contributes towards the growing interdisciplinary field of complementary currencies and grassroots innovation. Finally, it provides a template for the evaluation of sustainable community-economic initiatives more generally. The thesis concludes that these initiatives and their wider movements are a promising avenue for research and development in sustainability.

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## **Author's Declaration**

This research was conducted as part of an ESRC-funded PhD. This is the work solely of the named author and all material from the work of others is fully acknowledged in accordance with the standard referencing practices. This thesis is approved by the Graduate School of the University of Bath, and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

## List of Abbreviations

ACE	Action Caerau Ely
CES	Community Exchange System
CPR's	Common Pool Resources
CSA	Community Supported Agriculture
DCLG	Department on Communities and Local Government
DCTB	Dane County Timebank
DECC	Department on Energy and Climate Change
DEFRA	Department for the Environment and Rural Affairs
DoI	Diffusion of Innovations
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
GEN	Global Ecovillage Network
IPA	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
IPCC	International Panel on Climate Change
IRS	International Revenue Service
LETS	Local Exchange Trading Scheme
MAN's	Mutual Aid Networks
MCC	Madison Community Cooperative
MGE	Madison Gas and Electric
NEF	New Economics Foundation
SCT	Social Cognitive Theory
SDT	Self Determination Theory
SIT	Social Identity Theory
SPT	Social Practice Theory
VCS	Voluntary and Community Sector
WEF	World Economic Forum
WWOOF	Worldwide Organisation of Organic Farming

## **Part One**

### **Theoretical and Policy Background**

This first part of the thesis contains four chapters that serve to introduce the study and situate it within the appropriate theoretical and policy background. Chapter One introduces the research questions and outlines the aims and scope of the study in light of the theory and policy context. This is followed by two literature review chapters: the first looks at socio-psychological factors affecting sustainable community relations and the second looks at socio-economic relations as a means of promoting sustainability. These very different theoretical fields both contribute equally to the interdisciplinary study of these recently emerging community-economic initiatives. Chapter Four then introduces the three organisations that will be the subject for investigation in this thesis.

# Chapter One

## Introduction to the Thesis

### 1. Policy Context

Today, the challenges facing humanity remain unresolved. The World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report considers environmental risks: 'water crises', 'climate change' and 'extreme weather events' as three of the 'top ten risks of global concern' in 2014 (WEF, 2014). Furthermore, the interconnected nature of these with other economic, geopolitical, social and technological risks is highlighted. Global poverty reduction has resulted in increased population and consumption worldwide. As the global population is expected to rise from 6.8 billion to 8.3 billion by 2030, a 38 percent deficit in food as well as huge deficits in water and energy is predicted. Climate change, also an economic risk in itself, is linked to global governance failure and fiscal crises, as well as being a multiplier of other risks, such as extreme weather events, water and food crises.

The latest assessment by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2013) has released its strongest statement on observed changes to the climate system to date: 'Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, and since the 1950s, many of the observed changes are unprecedented over decades to millennia. The atmosphere and ocean have warmed, the amounts of snow and ice have diminished, sea level has risen, and the concentrations of greenhouse gases have increased' (p.4). The report states that each of the last three decades has been successively warmer at the Earth's surface than any preceding decade since 1850, resulting in changes in the global water cycle including greater contrasts in precipitation between wet and dry regions and between wet and dry seasons. Further damage to economic assets, such as city and industrial infrastructure, agriculture and key global supply chains, caused by such extreme weather events is becoming more evident, as is the fragility of global mobility systems. As such, the need to forge alternative paths towards sustainability is greater than ever.

The emergence of more localised solutions, or 'a more intricate lattice of multiple, interconnected government agreements across different themes, regions or sectors' (WEF, 2014, p. 22), is pushed by the potential failure of a global climate change framework. Indeed, the risk of 'global governance failure' in response to climate change is increasingly pertinent following repeated failures by world leaders to meet emissions reduction targets



and to agree on climate finance (WEF, 2014). Failed negotiations led 132 developing countries to walk out of talks at the latest United Nations Climate Change Conference in Warsaw. Consequently, 'resilience' has become a key policy and agency theme to counteract the growing sense of economic, political and social risk that changing climatic conditions pose. The WEF states that:

*'Such a heterogeneous and diverse intergovernmental and public-private response to the climate-change risk could offer more resilience and flexibility to the dynamic challenge of climate change than a homogenous, single global framework.'* (WEF, 2014, p. 22)

In the United Kingdom, although most emphasis has been placed on actors who operate at national level, there is a growing recognition that action at the local and community levels is needed for climate mitigation and to embed resilience in the energy system (DECC, 2009). This move is reflected in recent legislative changes. For example, the Localism Act, introduced in 2011 gives freedom and flexibility to communities, allowing them to take over public services and community assets as well as influence planning and development (DCLG, 2012). The devolution of power to communities, accompanied by financial recession and growing public unrest has led to the emergence of new models of sustainable living and creative exchange within communities (Scott-Cato and Hillier, 2010). Big Society policy has aimed to support these co-ops, mutuals, charities and social enterprises, and this was emphasised in DEFRA's report 'Getting the Message Across' (DEFRA, 2012), where evidence is provided for the crucial role of Social Enterprises in creating a sustainable society.

However, as outlined in the final audit of the Big Society Initiative (Civil Exchange, 2015), major criticisms are that:

*'The market based model for increasing competition and choice in public services has undermined the achievement of key goals', that 'key services are not meeting needs, perpetuating social division and creating unsustainable costs for the state', and finally, that 'pressure on resources, applied to a market model, is creating a 'race to the bottom' on contract price and lowering care standards' (p.7-8).*

Insufficient funding provision to the Voluntary and Community Sector was therefore a major obstacle to the success of the Big Society, leading to what is termed a 'Big Society Gap' between rich and poor. It is suggested that:

*'Cuts may have been inevitable but what has been lacking is dialogue with social partners and those directly affected to plan a better way forward' (p.7).*

These indications support the more urgent investigation and introduction of alternative economic models for sustainability, and this study responds to the call for dialogue by

investigating the development of sustainable and resilient community models. Models that enable community co-production have recently come into favour as a new approach to social service delivery. Examples in the United Kingdom include the 'Expert Patient Scheme' in the NHS and 'Camden in Touch', pioneered by the CSV to encourage volunteering. The mental health Charity, 'Mind', also uses co-production within communities in their 'Human Givens' approach, the Citizens Advice Bureau's ROTA project trains prisoners to support each other, and the 'KeyRing' scheme sets up support networks for young people with learning difficulties (Lewis and Greenham, 2014).

It is becoming increasingly evident that potential exists within organisations and schemes such as these for methods of reciprocal community exchange to fulfil a 'connecting' role in the social service sector. Given that social exclusion and lower socioeconomic status has been negatively correlated with pro-environmental behaviour, these models may also provide the social participation and reciprocal exchange necessary for individuals to engage in more sustainable livelihoods<sup>1</sup>. The flexibility of these models is therefore a strength in effecting institutional change towards more sustainable methods of exchange and low-impact living.

In contrast, Government attempts to promote sustainable behaviour have so far failed or only partially succeeded, for example, the NUDGE campaign run by the Behavioural Insights Team of the UK Cabinet Office employs cognitive and behavioural psychology to 'Nudge' individual consumers into better decision making through constructing a premeditated 'choice architecture' at points of consumption (Cabinet Office, 2010). Financial incentives are also offered to encourage individual behaviours (NEF, 2008). However, these approaches have failed to motivate widespread change, and recent research in psychology has found that quick-fix policies which aim to 'change behaviour without changing minds' (Dobson, 2010) may actually work to accelerate resource destruction. This occurs as moral responses are crowded out by means of fiscal incentives (Dobson, 2010), and through phenomena such as the 'rebound effect', which offsets the benefits of new measures through greater efficiency (Thøgersen, 2012).

Consequently UK Government departments have begun to show interest in community solutions for sustainability (DEFRA, 2011). This is evident in two of the nine key behaviours identified in the Sustainable Lifestyles Framework (2011) report: (1) 'Being part of

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: Huddart Kennedy, 2015; Martinsson and Lundqvist, 2010; Blomquist and Whitehead 1998, Carlsson and Johansson-Stenman 2000, Zelesny et al. 2000, Jagers 2009

improving the environment’ and (2) ‘Setting up and using resources in your community’. This trend has since seen more focussed studies into community sustainability and resilience projects. For example, a report from the Department of Energy and Climate Change in January 2014 evaluates community energy projects in the UK. Around 5,000 community groups were found to have considered, commenced or completed energy projects since 2008 and the sector is described as ‘relatively young and rapidly developing’ (DECC, 2014 p.5).

However social enterprises, both in the United Kingdom and in the United States are increasingly influenced by the principles of the corporate and commercial sector (OECD, 2003). This suggests the need for community-economic initiatives to be better understood and supported as a complementary approach to sustainable development. Responding to these needs, the current study builds on DEFRA’s current research agenda by exploring sustainable community models, and offers key points of comparison between the British and American contexts, contributing to the development of policy-relevant knowledge in this area.

## **2. Theoretical Context**

This study responds directly to key strategic research recommendations outlined by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA, 2008) and is in line with growing government interest in community processes. It is in accordance with all three priorities in the ESRC’s 2011-2015 Delivery Plan, particularly ‘Influencing Behaviour and Informing Interventions’ and the ‘Vibrant and Fair Society’ themes which, among other objectives, aims to enhance the role of voluntary sector organisations in promoting sustainable living following the economic recession (ESRC, 2011). These findings will therefore be of interest to the chosen organisations as well as to researchers investigating pro-environmental behaviour change and associated policy options.

A review of the literature on environmental behaviour change points to a multitude of studies that look to habits and other cognitive heuristics as explanations for the persisting value-action gap among individuals (see Barr and Gilg, 2006). These, largely quantitative, studies attempt to simplify the social world by targeting individuals in isolation and by generalising behavioural contexts, with little or no success to date (DEFRA, 2008). Debates within environmental psychology have also questioned the extent to which individual agents are capable of achieving pro-environmental behaviour change without more structural changes being implemented within society (Maniates, 2001; Shove, 2003).

The failure of mainstream psychological models to direct large-scale behaviour change among individuals highlights the need for collective, community-based research into pro-environmental practices (Verplanken, ISEE 2011; DEFRA, 2008). To this end, the current study contributes a more situated understanding of human psychology by acknowledging the way in which individual behaviours are embedded within the context of specific social groupings. This diverges from mainstream psychological theory by shifting the focus from 'behaviour change' to the way that communities may live and work together in an ecologically sustainable way. It draws, not only on traditional psychology, incorporating personal values, beliefs and identity processes, but also on social psychology, looking at social norms and group practices. The current research therefore takes an interdisciplinary approach, challenging mainstream psychology's approach to environmental behaviour change and its associated policies.

In particular, it builds on a number of large research endeavours in the emerging interdisciplinary study of community sustainability. For example, the Energy and Communities Collaborative Venture consists of seven research grants funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to address energy demand reduction within communities. The Arts and Humanities Research Council is also leading an ongoing research programme on 'Connected Communities' designed to understand the role of communities in sustaining and enhancing our quality of life. Within this context of growing academic interest and investment in community sustainability research, the present investigation of community-economic initiatives and their role in behaviour change is timely, and aims to contribute practical, policy relevant insights to inform these future research endeavors.

This study also builds on an emerging academic interest in alternative economic models for sustainability, particularly in response to increased austerity and a growing criticism of the global financial system (Bendell, 2013). For example, the ESRC has recently funded a multi-disciplinary Centre for the Understanding of Sustainable Prosperity (CUSP) at the University of Surrey. It aims to address in particular the challenge of achieving financial stability and high employment under conditions of constrained resource consumption, as well as looking at both corporate and social enterprise to test new business models for sustainability.

Limited attention has been given, however, to alternative currency models within mainstream academia, with the majority of new studies appearing in the volunteer-run International Journal of Community Currency Research (Bendell, 2013). Outside of

academia, the New Economics Foundation is the UK's leading think tank promoting social economic and environmental justice. Its latest collaborative project entitled, 'Community Currencies in Action' supports and evaluates a range of alternative currencies around the world and has pioneered the first 'knowledge commons' for alternative economic models. These theoretical developments suggest an emerging interest in redefining the contested meanings of prosperity itself, along with developing alternative economic practices and models based on these new moral framings; motivations that affirm the investigation of community-economic models as alternative paths to sustainability. Indeed, this study aims to have practical, as well as theoretical, implications for the design and implementation of these models.

Unlike the majority of research in environmental psychology, this study is situated within an interdisciplinary context with practical implications for promoting environmental behaviour change. It transcends the psychology of individuals to include political, economic and sociological discourses; a mix that is increasingly seen as necessary to explore rapidly changing, complex social systems (Fahy and Rau, 2013). For example, instead of investigating single behaviours such as recycling, lifestyle is approached in a more holistic sense, incorporating the relationships, feelings and experiences associated with group membership. It explores the way in which lifestyle choices effect, and are affected by group participation, and the way that groups in turn affect social and cultural change. Because individuals are embedded within multiple social groups, both group members and the groups themselves are analysed using information inferred from interviews, group observation and analysis of secondary data. This multi-level approach to investigating community sustainability is in line with recent theoretical developments that emphasise community processes, and the contribution of this study is to further this line of inquiry (DEFRA, 2012; Dobson, 2007).

Within contemporary applied social psychology, this analysis demands that social systems, from communities to whole societies, are defined as dynamic, evolving entities. In conducting a holistic, qualitative analysis of community group processes this analysis offers a valuable contribution to the literature on environmental behaviour change and community sustainability. It aims to answer urgent questions regarding successful and unsuccessful organisational processes that may be adopted by emerging community-economic initiatives aimed at sustainability, with both theoretical and practical consequences.

### **3. The Aims and Scope of this Study**

This study aims to investigate the development of three sustainable and resilient community models. The initiatives chosen for investigation were Lammas Eco-village in Wales, Dane County Timebank in Madison, Wisconsin, in the United States, and Bristol Local Exchange Trading Scheme in the United Kingdom. These three organisations were chosen because they share certain aspects that are conducive to sustainable living:

1. They represent systemic solutions that are part of global movements
2. They are grassroots initiatives organising for community level sustainability
3. They holistically respond to economic, social and environmental challenges
4. They incorporate reciprocal, non-monetary, peer-to-peer trade networks

First, these groups were chosen because they address the underlying causes of unsustainability in ways that can be scaled up to have global reach; in contrast to stand-alone charities that operate within a particular geographical area or interest group. These new 'social experiments' have great potential for social change through their transferability across a wide variety of social and cultural contexts. These initiatives are located within developed Western nations, where in light of the policy context outlined above, such models are an emerging subject for research. A cross-national study of these groups is intended to shed light on the cultural and cross-cultural factors that influence members' experiences and motivations for joining. As an evolving social experiment in sustainability, the current study aims to document the development of these organisations within natural settings, and aims to have global implications for both policy and theory.

Second, the chosen organisations are grassroots initiatives organising for community level sustainability. Instead of changing dominant socio-economic structures, all three represent alternative channels for pro-environmental behaviour to take place within communities. Indeed, the selected groups involve civic engagement to create new socio-economic structures in which to live, and these may be seen as exemplars to society at large. Following Horton's (2006) 'elite model' of environmental citizenship, the values and practices demonstrated by volunteers are seen as a potentially useful model for a more sustainable society. By documenting the conditions determining the lifestyles of these 'green' citizens, conditions may then be expanded to promote such lifestyles among wider sections of the population. Although members of the selected organisations are not typical of society in general, Benton (2008, p.218) argues that:

*'Pre-figurative work in establishing alternative ways of interacting with nature in the interstices of existing society can give some glimpses of what might be gained from larger scale social changes.'*

Studying both successful and unsuccessful attempts at community sustainability could lead to recommendations that support further community development interventions and generate social change. For example, if certain experiences and group processes are found to be successful in promoting sustainable livelihoods and environmental values among members, community practitioners might replicate these elsewhere. Equally, information regarding unsuccessful strategies provides important data on how obstacles to community sustainability might be overcome.

Third, the Ecovillage Movement, the Timebanking Movement and the Local Exchange Trading Scheme (LETS) Movement provide holistic, collective and structural alternatives to current practices, based on an understanding of global environmental challenges as being inseparable from other economic, geopolitical and social risks (World Economic Forum, 2014). These movements therefore encompass all 'three pillars of sustainability' within their remit, that is, not only environmental protection and management goals, but also community approaches that tackle connected social, economic and environmental dimensions (Scott-Cato, 2009). Lammas Ecovillage has the strongest environmental focus through low-impact living, the Dane County Timebank the strongest social focus through its social service provision, and Bristol LETS a more economic focus through its function as a community currency initiative. There is clearly much overlap between the three initiatives in addressing these three 'sustainability goals' and so this comparison is not a core question of the thesis. However, these goals are kept in mind when analysing the advantages and challenges faced by group members in the practical day-to-day activities of each initiative, and are discussed in the following chapters.

Finally, these groups were selected as they represent alternative means by which communities can meet their own financial needs, particularly given the lack of financial stimulus provided for the Big Society (Civil Exchange, 2015), and the challenges faced by non-profit organisations in both the United Kingdom and the United States in securing sustainable sources of funding. As such, the chosen initiatives represent paths to developing sustainable and resilient livelihoods at a local level, and this is in line with the emergence of more localised solutions for sustainability. For these reasons, community-economic initiatives working as exemplars to society at large provide a promising and practical avenue for research into sustainable living.

Importantly, statistical generalization is not an aim of this study, and so the results cannot be assumed to be typical of a population (Yin, 1994). As a piece of qualitative research, it does, however, aim for theoretical transferability from the small defined sample of three initiatives to the broader theory, introduced in Chapters Two and Three. As these findings are transferred from single cases to more general theories, this study is intended to have a wide applicability to the concept of sustainable community models (Yin, 1994). However, practical concepts may only be transferred to applicable cases, most accurately within British and American contexts. The transferability of more abstract psychological theories, on the other hand, may be wider depending on the scope and applicability of the theory, as discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

#### **4. Research Questions**

This research responds to a growing interest in the contribution that communities can make towards sustainability, as highlighted above. In doing so, the first aim of this study is to investigate the phenomenological experiences of group members in order to better understand the role of community group membership in developing sustainable values and practices. The second aim of this study is to document the changing structures and processes of the chosen community-economic organisations. In this second stage of analysis, processes governing the formation, maintenance and potential contraction of the groups are determined using primary and secondary data. These two stages of analysis are presented as two research questions:

1. How do members understand their experience within the selected groups?
2. What processes lead to the formation, maintenance and contraction of these groups?

Research Question One focuses on the phenomenological experience of group membership and what this means to participants in terms of their values and practices. Analysis of these data will link findings to the socio-psychological and socio-economic literature. Dynamic group processes are then analysed using secondary data about the group and cultural context, to ask: what processes have supported the formation, maintenance and contraction of these groups? Together, these individual and group level data contribute towards rich and detailed descriptions of each case in context, before considering the convergence and divergence of themes across the data set. These findings will finally be used to draw conclusions that practically inform the design of these organisations.



## **5. Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis consists of twelve chapters. These are divided into three parts. Part One serves to introduce the thesis and situate it within its theoretical and policy context, which has been accomplished in the current chapter. This is followed by two literature review chapters: the first exploring socio-psychological theories in the field of environmental behaviour change, and the second exploring recently emerging theories at the intersection of economics, cognitive psychology and politics. These fields of inquiry converge in the interdisciplinary study of community sustainability, and it is hoped that the current findings further bridge the gap between these important fields. Finally, Chapter Four introduces the three initiatives, providing a history and overview of each.

Part Two of the thesis then presents the methodology. This is divided into two chapters. Chapter Five introduces the methodological approaches of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis and provides a justification for the use of interviews, participant observation and secondary data analysis in light of the methodological literature. Importantly, this chapter explores my positionality as an external investigator studying these groups, and discusses the implications of this in relation to the findings. Chapter Six then describes the data collection and analytical procedures, including personal reflections on the research process.

Finally, Part Three of the thesis presents and discusses the findings. In answer to Research Question One, Chapters Seven to Nine explore participants' personal, group and cultural experiences of group membership (Bandura, 2001). Chapters Ten and Eleven then turn to an analysis of the organisations themselves, in answer to Research Question Two. These evaluate the structures and processes of the organisations as well as the wider contextual factors influencing their diffusion as social movements. Finally, Chapter Twelve provides an interpretation of these findings in relation to the literature presented in Part One. This chapter also includes an evaluation of the study and discusses its implications for both theory and practice.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Socio-psychological Approaches to Sustainability**

#### **1. Introduction**

There are two theoretical approaches to understanding community-economic initiatives that respond to the connected challenges that we face today; these are the socio-psychological and socio-economic approaches. These may be seen as complementary, and including both is essential to a comprehensive investigation of the chosen initiatives. Importantly, both of these areas of investigation are necessarily interdisciplinary. They focus on the object of investigation, that is, sustainability, by drawing on literature in the fields of psychology, sociology and economics.

This chapter addresses the socio-psychological approaches to sustainability, outlining major theories that have been suggested in recent decades. Within this area of study, scholars have developed theories based on the psychology of human behaviour and decision making. These have tended to focus on how individuals might choose to behave more sustainably in their daily lives. However, as highlighted in Chapter One, Government policies that aim to affect large-scale behaviour change using psychological approaches have so far failed or only partially succeeded, leading to stagnation in policy and innovation in this area (Burgess *et al*, 2003; Barr *et al*, 2011). As a consequence, interest in community processes as an alternative to individual behaviour change mechanisms has emerged (DEFRA, 2011).

This chapter will outline the theoretical developments in this area. First, section two introduces the rational choice models that pioneered the psychology of behaviour change and the theories that have challenged them. These approaches include population segmentation, human agency, theories of psychological motivation, and research into significant life experiences. Section three and four then draw on sociological approaches to behaviour change, to introduce the Communities of Practice studied here. Social Identity Theory and Social Practice Theory introduce a collective approach to sustainable behaviour, which has recently come into favour among theorists and policy makers (DEFRA, 2012). Finally, section five provides a concluding discussion, examining the implications of this review for the development of the research questions and methodology. Section six provides a chapter summary.

## **2. Challenges to the Psychology of Behaviour Change**

### **2.1 Rational Choice Models**

Within the field of environmental psychology, a considerable number of models have been developed over the past 50 years that aim to identify the factors determining human behaviours. Driving these was the suggestion that, through understanding how to influence behaviour, policy makers could direct society to behave in more sustainable ways (review in Jackson, 2005). The earliest of these are known as 'rational choice models' and are generally founded on the premise that individuals take reasoned action in their own best interest, based on cost-benefit analyses (Jackson, 2005). Attitude was found to be a key factor determining behaviour and for this reason, they are also sometimes known as 'attitude-behaviour-choice' or ABC models (Shove, 2010).

The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) is one of the most widely cited theoretical models of behaviour change. It is one of a family of theories which adopt an objective, experimental approach to behaviour change that centres on individuals' cognition: their attitudes and beliefs. The TPB is an extension of the earlier theory of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) which saw 'intention to act' as the best predictor of behaviour. Intentions are seen to be affected by expected outcomes, subjective norms (beliefs about what others think) and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen and Madden 1986). With these variables, the TPB can only predict 20-30 percent of the variance in behaviour brought about via interventions; however a greater proportion of intention may be predicted (Morris *et al*, 2012).

More recent iterations of the TPB have included additional factors such as belief salience, habit, moral norms, affective beliefs and self-identity (e.g. Conner and Armitage, 1998; Mannetti *et al.*, 2004). Cialdini *et al*'s (1991) Focus Theory of Normative Conduct points to the role of 'social norms' in dictating which behaviours are seen as socially acceptable. Stern *et al*'s (1999) influential Value-Belief-Norm theory describes the influence of value sets on the emergence of a personal norm to act in a certain way and Hines (1987), developed the Model of Environmentally Responsible Behaviour after analysing 128 studies. This linear model is depicted below:

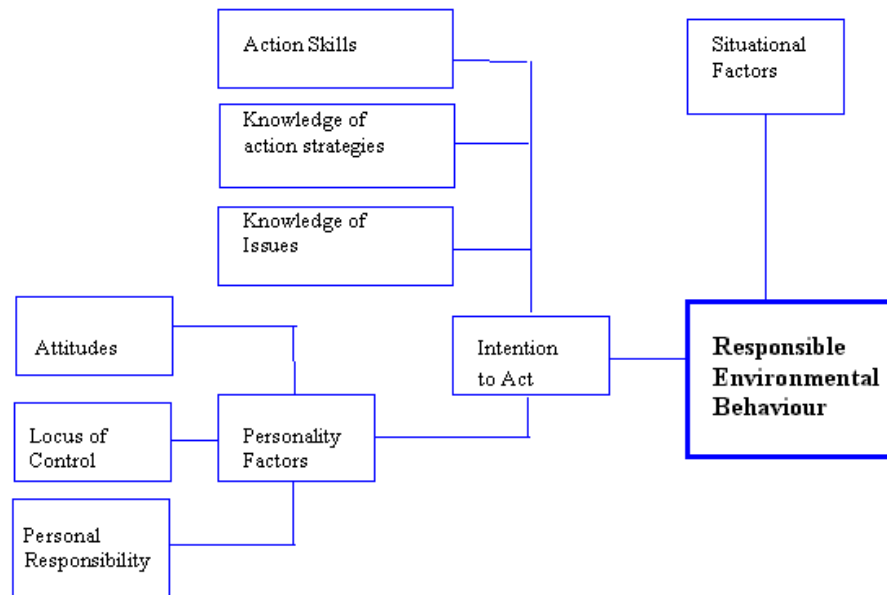


Figure One. The Hines Model of Responsible Environmental Behaviour (adapted from Hines et al. 1987)

These studies provide an early indication of the now-infamous ‘value-action gap’, of which Hines (1987) stated that:

*‘An individual who expresses an intention to take action will be more likely to engage in the action than will an individual who expresses no such intention, however it appears that intention to act is merely an artefact of a number of other variables acting in combination e.g. cognitive knowledge, cognitive skills and personality factors’ (Hungerford, 1983, p.259).*

More recently, the suggestion by Stern (2000) that individuals do not exist in a social vacuum led to the belief that situational factors may indeed override cognitive factors. Staying within the same rational decision-making paradigm, this resulted in the inclusion of yet more situational variables to the decision-making processes e.g. social norms, social networks and surrounding infrastructures (Barr, 2003; Martin et al., 2006; Olli et al., 2001).

However, Jackson, (2005) found that as the number of factors predicting behaviour increased, the predictive capacity of the models reduced, and their increasing complexity also reduced their practical applicability to real-world contexts. Eventually, as these linear models have become more untenable, failing to yield sufficient results, psychologists have begun to question the linear model of decision-making itself, rather emphasising the role of situational context (Bamberg, 2003).

## 2.2 Segmentation

This theoretical development is highlighted by the recent popularity of applying a market-based concept to behaviour change, which seeks to tailor messages to carefully selected

population segments in order to cancel out the influence of real and perceived contextual 'barriers' and create new social norms for pro-environmental behaviour. Hargreaves (2011) suggests that the persistence of linear models was perhaps due, in part, to the fact that they result in relatively straightforward policy responses, and the same could be said for market-based approaches. For example, both DEFRA and a range of other agencies have, in recent years, relied on segmentation as the basis of strategies which now focus on the marketing of 'sustainable lifestyles' to selected audiences (Barr, 2011; DEFRA, 2008). Darnton and Sharp (2006) noted that at least 25 different segmentation models currently exist at the interface of academic and policy research (Anable, 2005, Barr and Gilg, 2006 and Dallen, 2007).

Barr *et al* (2011) found, however, that although sustainable lifestyles may be practiced in the home, this is often not the case in leisure and tourism contexts, where resource consumption increases. The policy implications of a segmentation approach are therefore not as straightforward as was hoped, given that policies targeting a particular population segment are likely to be ineffective when applied outside the narrow confines of the home context, for example, or when they are related to contested issues such as climate change (Barr *et al*, 2011). The broad concept of 'sustainable lifestyles' is therefore argued to be 'slippery' as different behaviours are practiced in different contexts.

By focusing on extrinsic lifestyle choices rather than the underlying motivation for those lifestyles, market-based approaches are also argued to legitimize rather than challenge a range of unsustainable social conventions (Shove, 2003, 2010). They also fail to appreciate the embedded and mutually-constitutive nature of social relations, contexts and infrastructures that contribute towards lifestyle choices (Bedford, 1999; Hobson, 2003; Nye and Hargreaves, 2010; Shove, 2003; Southerton *et al.*, 2004; Spaargaren and Van Vliet, 2000).

### **3. Alternative Approaches in Psychology**

The literature covered in the above sections has focussed on the psychological models and approaches that have been developed over the past 50 years with the aim of promoting pro-environmental behaviour. As this progression has demonstrated, simplistic approaches that draw on particular variables were found to be inadequate for modelling complex behavioural patterns. Consequently, recent thinking across the field has been concerned with developing more holistic frameworks that take into account social contexts, for

example through population segmentation and interventions based on market research (Barr, 2011).

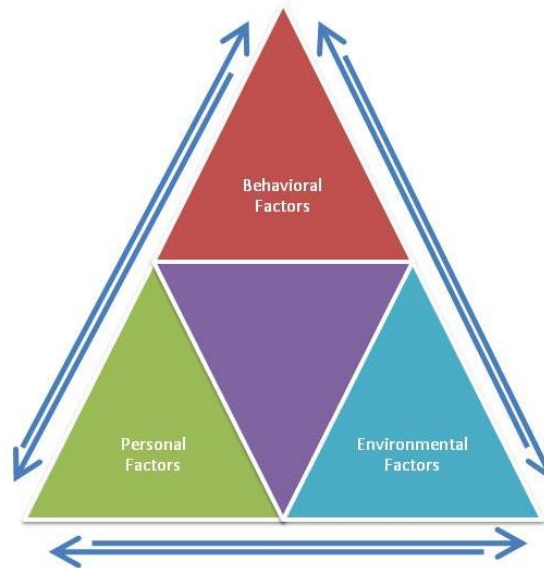
These models, however, assume that the behaviours themselves are universal rather than considering their underlying motivations. Through offering a surface-level analysis of human behaviour, to date they have had low predictive ability, as well as being unable to account for the huge range of individual reactions in any given context. In this respect, Hargreaves (2011) argues that:

*'The significant challenges posed by issues such as climate change, and the extensive transformations they appear to require across whole domains of society demand, in turn, a broad and sophisticated understanding of social life and change. If pro-environmental behaviour and sustainable consumption are to be achieved at the rate they are needed, conventional narrow models of individual behaviour change may need to be abandoned' (p.96).*

In this light, the following sections in this and in the following chapter will begin to draw on theories outside of the sub-discipline of environmental psychology. These include the concepts of agency, intrinsic motivation and learned environmental sensitivity. In later chapters, these concepts will guide the data analysis, but are introduced here for purposes of clarity. Due to the inductive nature of this study the theories in this and the following chapter were not examined prior to data analysis. When emerging themes appeared to resonate with a particular theory, the relevant literature was then further examined. In this way, the literature review represented an on-going, iterative process that continued throughout the analysis phase. The following section will now turn to Social Cognitive Theory, where it is 'personal agency' that drives social learning and determines social behaviours.

### **3.1 Personal Agency**

Introduced by Albert Bandura in 1989, Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) deals with the way behaviours are learnt socially Bandura emphasises the role of 'personal agency' in changing behaviour within particular contexts. In 1986, he published *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory*, in which he suggested a reciprocal causal triad between human behaviour, environmental factors, and personal factors such as cognitive, affective, and biological events. This is depicted below:



*Figure Two. Bandura's Triad of Reciprocal Causation*

Through emphasising the role of cognition, SCT offers an agentic perspective to human adaptation and change where humans are not merely seen as being reactive, driven by impulse or shaped by environmental forces, as had been conceived by behaviourist psychologists during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Gazzaniga, 2010).

'Agency' refers to the capacity of an agent to act in the world, and according to Bandura (2001) this is the essence of humanness. To be an agent is to influence intentionally one's functioning and life circumstances, and in turn this influences human development, adaptation, and change (Bandura, 1989, 2001). Within SCT, our 'personal agency' is constituted by the factors of intentionality, forethought, self-regulation, self-reflectiveness and the meaning and purpose of one's life pursuits (Bandura, 2001). In particular, SCT distinguishes among three modes of agency: individual, proxy, and collective agency, which are exercised synergistically everyday life.

Direct personal agency is exercised individually, as people influence environmental factors through various cognitive, motivational, affective and choice processes (Bandura, 2001). However, where people do not have direct control over their lives, they exercise socially mediated, or 'proxy', agency to get those who have access to resources, influence or power to secure desired outcomes on their behalf (Baltes, 1996; Brandtstadter, 1992). This naturally involves surrendering personal control to intermediaries, who may hold differing beliefs and values. Nevertheless, this type of agency is highly prevalent as part of social life, as individuals do not live in individual autonomy, but are interdependent. Many goals are only achievable through working together in an interdependent effort. Collective agency

then, occurs when whole societies pool their knowledge, skills, and resources towards shaping a collectively desired future (Bandura, 2000). To exercise collective agency, 'collective self-efficacy' beliefs are required, that is, beliefs among a society in their capability to achieve joint goals.

On an individual level, self-efficacy is 'the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations' (Bandura, 1995, p.2). Individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to believe they can master challenging problems, as Bandura (1997 cited in Donaldson and Berger, 2012 p. 56) argues:

*'It is partly on the basis of efficacy beliefs that people choose what challenges to undertake, how much effort to expend in the endeavour, how long to persevere in the face of obstacles and failures, and whether failures are motivating or demoralizing.'*

This has implications for learning and practicing sustainable behaviours, which are challenging, particularly in a society in which many of the skills required in order to live sustainably are lost, undervalued and practiced in hostile contexts.

At the level of society, collective self-efficacy beliefs are said to serve similar functions and operate through similar processes. However, because social systems involve transactional dynamics, perceived collective efficacy is seen as 'an emergent group-level property, not simply the sum of the efficacy beliefs of individual members' (Bandura, 2001, p.14). This might explain why the trajectory of humanity continues along an unsustainable path despite the personal self-efficacy of individuals who wish to behave more sustainably. In contributing towards such systems, there is clearly considerable personal variation in the level of agency experienced by individuals according to their socio-structural influences, and the extent to which they adopt or oppose societal prescriptions and sanctions (Burns and Dietz, 1992).

Indeed, a major criticism is that SCT fails to consider individual differences in underlying factors such as personality development, emotions, unconscious reactions, biological factors such as brain development, hormonal processes and learning differences (Rootman, 2013). SCT also fails to explain the connection between observational learning and self-efficacy despite both concepts being extensively researched and applied on separate terms (Rootman, 2013). This leads to the fundamental question of what motivates human agency, which is the topic of following section.



### 3.2 Theories of Human Motivation

Other lines of research have focussed more strongly on what motivates humans to act. Predating rational choice models of behaviour change, this line of inquiry began with Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' proposed in his paper, 'A Theory of Human Motivation' (1943). The model is akin to several theories describing the stages of growth in human developmental psychology, in which certain needs must be met before the individual will desire and be motivated towards fulfilling higher level needs. Maslow's hierarchy of needs, as depicted in a pyramid, is included below:



*Figure Three. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*

The bottom four layers of the hierarchy are called 'deficiency needs'. If not met, these hinder the proper functioning of the individual, for example if food, safety and belonging are neglected, the individual will feel anxious and tense. A range of 'meta-needs' or 'being needs' are included in the category of self-actualisation, and Maslow coined the term 'meta-motivation' to describe the motivation of those who go beyond satisfying basic needs and strive towards fulfilling their inherent ultimate potential (Engler, 2009).

According to Terror Management Theory, gaining self-esteem also reduces the 'mortal anxiety' or the fear of death, suggesting that progress up the pyramid towards self-actualisation is driven by the existential motivation to fulfil a higher 'purpose' in life (Greenburg et al. 1986). In his later years, Maslow criticised and reviewed his vision of self-actualization to suggest that the self only becomes actualised through pursuing some higher goal outside of oneself, in altruism and spirituality (Maslow, cited in Hoffman, 1996). Indeed, when a person experiences self-actualization, much of what they accomplish may

benefit others or, 'the greater self', leading to a felt sense of meaningfulness in life (Snyder, 2005).

The most recent and widely applied theory of motivation in the field of psychology is Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Initially developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, SDT is concerned with the degree to which an individual's behaviour is self-motivated. Like Social Cognitive Theory, SDT states that, as part of human nature, individuals demonstrate 'inherent growth tendencies', that is, effort, agency, and commitment toward growth and development. As a result, behaviours are classified as either intrinsically motivated (to develop oneself) or extrinsically motivated (to obtain an external goal) (Deci 1971; Deci and Ryan, 2002). Deci and Ryan also proposed three intrinsic needs that are the basis for self-determination: autonomy, competence and relatedness. These provide a framework for human motivation that may be applied to the context of sustainability.

Autonomy is particularly important in promoting sustainable lifestyles. When individuals are allowed to behave autonomously, that is, to act freely and with self-direction, the literature shows that they are more persistent and report higher levels of well-being (Deci and Ryan, 2002). Consequently, a meta-analysis of 60 studies found that interventions to encourage pro-environmental behaviour are more effective, resulting in more recycling or less fuel use, when they promote intrinsic, autonomous regulation, that is, when they encourage people to pursue behaviours because they are important or meaningful. These findings are in comparison to treatments that promote extrinsic, non-autonomous control through guilt, anxiety, or rewards and punishment (Osbaldeston, 2005).

Deci (1971) also found that offering people extrinsic rewards such as money for behaviour that is intrinsically motivated, undermined their autonomy and led them to become less interested in the behaviour. This is consistent with a wealth of literature in the field of environmental behaviour change arguing that reward-based policies actually 'crowd out' pro-environmental behaviour (Slocum, 2004; Berglund and Matti, 2006). However, it should be remembered that this tendency to focus on the role of individuals engaging in incremental behavioural changes for sustainability, which Crompton and Thøgersen (2009) call 'simple and painless' practices, is likely to have only marginal collective benefits (Crompton and Thøgersen, 2009).

Intrinsic motivation must therefore affect, not only small changes to behaviour such as making responsible consumer decisions (e.g. DEFRA, 2005, p. 25), but should affect whole

lifestyle shifts. In this regard Peattie and Peattie (2009) particularly criticise the social marketing approach to sustainable consumption (section 2.2) by stating that:

*‘Meaningful progress towards sustainability requires more radical solutions than just the development of new products and product substitutions amongst consumers’ (p. 261).*

Such products merely act as extrinsic motivators, and indeed, the lack of ‘spillover’ effects found between different practice sites (Haq *et al.*, 2008), may be attributed to policies that promote transient extrinsic rewards rather than nurturing autonomy and competence to produce intrinsic motivation among individuals.

Indeed, while passive consumption undermines competence, growing and making one’s own food is likely to promote competence to a much higher degree. As highlighted in section 2.3 with regard to feelings of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995), it is crucial to help individuals overcome initial feelings of incompetence when learning new and unfamiliar sustainable behaviours in order for those behaviours to be sustained, as well as to promote higher levels of well-being (Kasser, 2009). Relying on money and consumer goods as extrinsic motivators also undermines the need for relatedness (Vohs and Goode, 2006). In contrast, collective sustainable behaviours such as community-supported agriculture programs, co-ops, and local currencies each lead to more interaction with those who share common values, building a sense of community connection, which improves relatedness and personal well-being at the same time as ecologically sustainable behaviour is promoted (Kasser, 2009).

By underpinning the deeper, intrinsic, motivations that underlie behaviours, the literature in SDT demonstrates how current policy frameworks that promote extrinsic rewards avoid the more fundamental questions of how to nurture the type of intrinsic motivation that is likely to affect real societal change.

### **3.3 Significant Life Experiences**

A lesser known strand of research conducted in the field of Environmental Education highlights the role of ‘significant life experiences’ (SLE) in determining future environmental behaviour (Tanner, 1980; Ceaser, 2015). These studies take a temporal approach, suggesting that current behaviours may not only function to meet immediate needs or be learned from others who model the desired behaviour, as suggested by SCT, but that these behaviours are also learned from significant past experiences. These constitute ‘a configuration that reflects the ways individuals are making choices in, and sense of, their lives’ (Marcinkowski, 1993, p. 9). Tanner (1998) writes that:

*'The rationale for such research is simple: if we find that certain kinds of early experience were important in shaping such adults, perhaps environmental educators can, to the degree feasible, replicate those experiences in the education of the young' (p. 365).*

To test the role of SLE, Palmer (1993) asked members of the National Environmental Education Association of the United Kingdom about what had led to their environmental concern and their choice of career. Outdoor experiences during childhood were mentioned by 42 percent of respondents, 49 percent mentioned outdoor and wilderness experiences not in childhood, and 59 percent attributed their concern to school or university courses. Interestingly, 18 percent of Palmer's sample referred to negative influences such as environmental catastrophes, nuclear threats, animal cruelty, waste, and pollution as contributing towards their environmental concern. In the case of their *most* significant life experience or influence, only 34 percent, however, were able to name a single most important influence and only 7 percent identified childhood outdoor experiences as being the most significant. Indeed Cawla (1998) notes that: 'In all studies of this topic most respondents give a cluster of reasons for their environmental interest or actions' (p.17).

In line with these findings, a large number of Environmental Education studies look at the role of 'environmental sensitivity' as a variable affecting later environmental behaviour. Hungerford and Volk (1990) stated that sensitivity to the environment is 'a function of an individual's contact with the outdoors in relatively pristine environments' (p.264). These environmentally sensitive individuals are reported to have engaged in 'hunting, fishing and other outdoor activities...over long periods of time' (Hungerford and Volk, 1990, p.264). Others also reported experiences with severe environmental degradation, the influence of environmentally sensitive teachers or being raised in an environmentally sensitive social environment as contributing factors (Peters-Grant, 1986; Peterson, 1982; Scholl, 1983; Tanner, 1980).

From these findings Peterson (1982) developed the environmental sensitivity scale, defining it as 'a set of affective attributes which result in an individual viewing the environment from an empathetic perspective' (1982, p. 5). In developmental psychology, researchers consider empathy to be the experience of feeling with another by sharing their perceived emotions (Eisenberg and Strayer, 1987). There is also accumulated evidence that young children tend to see the world as being alive and conscious, and this phenomenon of childhood animism suggests a possible developmental route into environmental concern (Bullock and Russell, 1985). Whether or not adults can empathise with the natural environment is also a controversial topic amongst environmental philosophers, depending

on whether or not they consider ecosystems to be living wholes with intrinsic intelligence, feeling, needs, and rights (Goodpaster, 1978; McDaniel, 1983; Naess, 1973). Within the existing literature, emotional communion with the living world therefore remains speculative.

Environmental Sensitivity is then as an important 'entry level' variable in the field of environmental education. However, spending time outdoors, particularly during childhood, does not necessarily result in pro-environmental action in itself. According to Hungerford and Volk (1990), this 'entry level variable' must be followed by 'ownership variables' (knowledge of issues, personal investment) and 'empowerment variables' (perceived skill, knowledge of action strategies, locus of control) which in turn lead to the development of an environmental ethic and resulting citizenship behaviour (Paterson, 1982). This progression is depicted in Hungerford and Volk's Environmental Behaviour Model below:

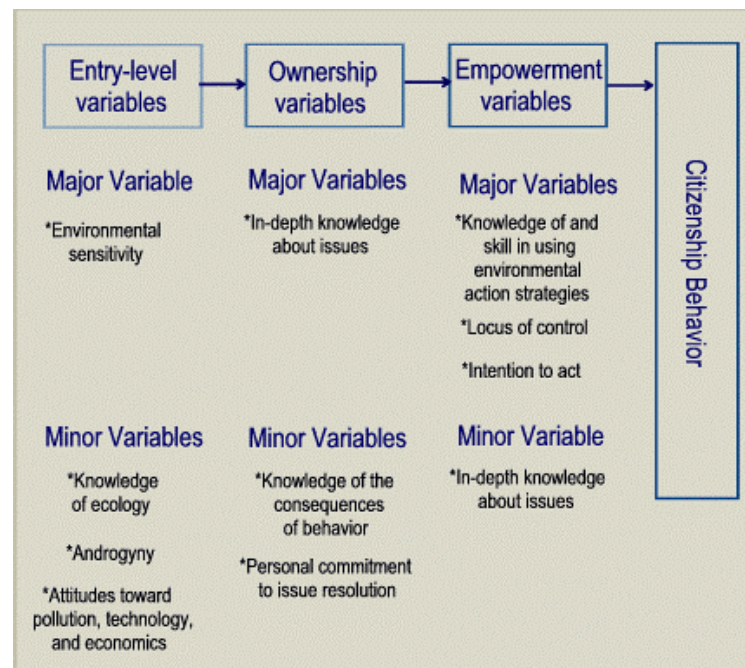


Figure Four. Hungerford and Volk's Environmental Behaviour Model (1990)

As noted by Hungerford and Volk (1990), the majority of environmental education research is quantitative surveys. These are criticised for failing to adequately account for the differing social characteristics of respondents, that is, experiences may be mediated quite differently depending on age, gender, race, culture and social class (Gough, 1999; Chawla, 1998). The linear models which result from such research consequently highlight particular variables and risk ignoring the social context in which sustainable practices exist. The literature is also criticised for failing to give enough attention to the psychological characteristics of the person who ultimately gives external events their significance. Several

studies have, therefore, pointed to the 'inner needs and interests' of individuals (Cromwell, 1988; Chawla, 1998). As Myers (1997) noted, the ultimate target of SLE research is not merely to know the experiences that people have had, but how their significance becomes constructed. These limitations point to the value that qualitative case study research would add to this area.

However, despite its relevance to environmental behaviour change, this once fruitful line of research has been limited to the attention of educational scholars. According to Gough (1999) the self-referential nature of SLE research in particular, may lead to the exclusion of other approaches (Dillon et al., 1999). Jickling and Spork (2006) also consider the cultural context of this type of research, suggesting that the 'Gaianist' or 'deep ecology' position, evident in the use of terminology such as 'environmental sensitivity', is only applicable in affluent Western societies. This contextuality, whilst being notable, does not invalidate Environmental Education research, however, as many authors argue that environmental ethics are necessarily contextual, being shaped by geography and historical experience, as opposed to being universal (Warren, 1990; Cheney, 1993). As a result of these factors, psychologists and sociologists have not widely benefitted from the psychological insights gleaned within this discipline during the 1970's-1990's.

Finally, research in this area has abated in recent years because the field of environmental education has, according to Jickling and Wals (2008) been significantly altered by neo-liberal globalizing forces, which promote instead 'education for sustainable development'. The authors contend that in the process, traditional environmental education, as an eco-centric attempt to engage people about their existential position and impact on Earth, is marginalized and excluded in favour of anthropocentric approaches that service the development of profit-making business. The same influences hold true for individuals and communities looking to address such questions in an autonomous way. As a result, the role of differing forms of significant life experience and their lasting impacts, particularly those promoting environmental sensitivity, remain relatively little understood.

#### **4. Sociological Approaches**

The previous sections explored psychological approaches to environmental behaviour change. Central to the rational choice models of the 1970's was the assumption that behaviour is 'the outcome of a linear and ultimately rational process' of decision making undertaken by relatively rational individuals (Harrison and Davies, 1998). Despite being poor predictors of behaviour, these models were favoured within neoliberal political

economies as they promoted cost-effective policy responses. They looked to encourage sustainable choices among sovereign consumers (Hobson, 2004; Shove, 2010). However, in light of the limited results of these policies (Burgess et al., 2003); researchers have turned their attention to population segmentation and market-based interventions (Barr, 2008; DEFRA, 2008).

A key theme running throughout these policy debates has been the extent to which sustainable or pro-environmental behaviour change is within the capacity of individual agents to bring about alone, that is, within the realms of psychology, or whether it requires more fundamental structural change in society (Maniates, 2001; Shove, 2003). What may be determined from the evidence presented thus far is that the failure of mainstream psychological models to influence widespread pro-environmental behaviour change among individual consumers (Verplanken, ISEE 2011; DEFRA, 2008) highlights the need for a collective, community-based approach to policy making that promotes moral ecological responsibility in Western society. This collective approach, taken by Social Practice Theorists, is presented in the following section.

#### **4.1 Social Cohesion and Communities of Practice**

Proponents of Social Practice Theory (SPT) criticise the individualistic nature of market approaches, arguing instead that practices are deeply embedded within social relations and material infrastructures (Hargreaves, 2011; Shove, 2003). Consequently, they study the embedded and mutually-constitutive nature of social relations, contexts and infrastructures in everyday life in order to overcome these limitations (Bedford, 1999; Hobson, 2003; Nye and Hargreaves, 2011; Shove, 2003; Southerton et al., 2004; Spaargaren and Van Vliet, 2000). One of the earliest social practice theorists, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977) described social life as:

*'A constant struggle to construct a life out of the cultural resources one's social experience offers, in the face of formidable social constraints. By living in a society structured by such constraints, and organised by the successful practices of others, one develops predispositions to act in certain ways' (Paterson, 2003 p.7).*

According to SPT, socio-structural contexts therefore constrain and determine behaviour, and this was also suggested by Timothy Jackson (2005), who states that:

*'We are guided as much by what others around us say and do, and by the 'rules of the game' as we are by personal choice. We often find ourselves 'locked in' to unsustainable behaviours in spite of our own best intentions' (Jackson, 2005, p.iii).*

However, social contexts are not only a constraining force on behaviour; they may also be empowering. A key concept from Social Practice Theory in this respect is 'communities of practice' as these are the sites in which behaviours may be learned and reinforced.

Although the term 'community of practice' is central to Social Practice Theory, it is of relatively recent coinage. Wenger (2006) describes them as being:

*'Formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression, a group of engineers working on similar problems, a clique of pupils defining their identity in the school, a network of surgeons exploring novel techniques, a gathering of first-time managers helping each other cope. In a nutshell: Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly' (p.1).*

Within dispersed Western communities this tendency towards collaboration forms communities of practice that are not necessarily explicit or formal, may not fit into official teams or social groups, and are not limited by geographic proximity. Nevertheless, members are distinguished from non-members through competence, and members support each other, share information and develop a shared practice. Mutual engagement in such practices also leads to a shared repertoire of meaning-making, which includes, 'routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions or concepts' (Wenger, 1998, p.83).

Unlike neighbourhood communities in the past, modern communities of practice currently work with the institutions of mass society, occupying various sectors and at various levels of scale, from local groups, to single organizations, partnerships, cities, regions, and international communities. New communication technologies expand the possibilities for community based on shared practice. However, lessons in how to effectively manage such communities has come from the experiential knowledge of communities where individuals live in close proximity such as in ecovillages and communes (Wenger, 1998). For example, Ecovillage Sieben Linden in East Germany has attempted feeling meetings, idea meetings and business meetings in order to manage their community of practice. The community is reported to have functioned exceptionally well when it regularly held all three kinds of meetings. However, when membership numbers exceeded fifty, a sense of group empathy diminished, feeling meetings were divided into subgroups and the energy that maintained them dissipated. Thinking meetings also fell into recession and now the Sieben Linden community only incorporates aspects of organized 'thinking' and 'feeling' into their



business meetings. Lewis and Greenham (2014) therefore suggest that in professional communities of practice:

*'It is not the structure that will determine the patterns of meaning that emerge, but the quality and nature of the interactions between individuals within it' (p.43).*

They warn against the imposition of transparent social structures because, they state:

*'They carry the danger of thinking that hidden transcripts and power dynamics will be eradicated by their very presence, whereas in fact they will still exist, only to have been buried even further from view because of what the 'structure' purports to deliver' (p.44).*

The use of both theoretical and first-hand evidence from community groups here demonstrates the benefit of applying experiential insights to the investigation of sustainable community models. The example of Sieben Linden demonstrates that developing community cohesion is an inherently uncertain and experimental process, informing the evaluation of similar community-economic initiatives and their sustainability practices in this study. While the decision-making and governance structures within communities of practice are an important topic of investigation, these processes however do not explain why group members choose to become involved in sustainability initiatives and how sustainable values and practices are both learnt and reinforced within such groups. For this, the current review turns to Social Identity Theory.

#### **4.2 Social Identity and Sustainable Behaviour**

Social Identity Theory was proposed in the 1970s and the 1980s as a means to explain intergroup behaviour (Tajfel and Turner, 1986; Turner, 1999). Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed that the groups which people belong to, such as family groups, teams or social classes, are an important source of pride and self-esteem as they provide a sense of belonging to the social world, that is, a social identity. The authors therefore introduced the concept of a 'social identity' as the part of one's self-concept derived from perceived membership within a social group (Turner and Oakes, 1986).

According to Social Identity Theory, there are three cognitive processes through which group identities develop. The first is categorization, where individuals are ascribed certain social categories such as black, white, Australian, Christian, student or mother, for example, which contribute to the functioning of society. These categories define appropriate behaviour by reference to the norms of those groups, keeping in mind that each individual can ascribe to several social categories. In the second stage, social identification, individuals adopt the identity of the group that they are categorised as belonging to and begin to act in

ways that they believe are appropriate to the group. This process of identification is emotionally significant to the individual as self-esteem becomes bound up with group membership.

Finally, social comparison involves comparing ones' group with other groups. Social Identity Theory posits that, in order to increase self esteem, one enhances the status of the group to which they belong, the 'in group', and self esteem might also be enhanced by discriminating and holding prejudice views against the 'out group'. A key assumption of Social Identity Theory is that individuals are intrinsically motivated to achieve positive distinctiveness. That is, individuals 'strive for a positive self-concept' (Haslam, 2001). However, the 'self-esteem hypothesis' of social identity theory has come under some scrutiny and has never been proven in its full and unqualified form, that is, through measures of global personal trait self-esteem (Rubin and Hewstone, 1998).

The theory might also be extended to include the concept of 'collective identity'. This is formed upon group members' acceptance of the identity and is often expressed through the group's cultures and traditions. During the 1980's, Alberto Melucci introduced a model of collective identity based on studies of collective action in social movements which suggested that collective groups are systematic collectives involving leadership models, communication methods and external relations, rather than simply being entities based on ideology or defined value sets (Melucci, 1989). Diani (1992) also writes that a social movement is,

*'A network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in political or cultural conflict, on the bases of a shared collective identity'. (p.16)*

These definitions highlight both the social and functional aspects of collective group action, as well as the role of collective identity as a central concept to the study of social groups. Recent research in the field of environmental psychology has also confirmed the role of identity processes in the formation and maintenance of 'neighbourhood networks' practicing pro-environmental and anti-consumerist behaviour. According to Kennedy (2011), environmental commitment arises through a sense of responsibility to this type of 'informal' neighbourhood network, which deepens members' ecological values through the mutual expectation of morally virtuous behaviour among community members, and by enacting a 'green' identity within the group. In her study of twelve sustainable communities in Canada, the positive feedback loops or 'virtuous circles' created by such networks were found to deepen members' commitments to reducing consumption and

draw others outside of the network towards sustainable living, as well as enhancing members' quality of life (Kennedy, 2011).

Participation within 'green' social networks such as these is found to support efforts to reduce consumption through sharing resources and shaping social norms. Furthermore, Kennedy (2011) found there to be a competitive dynamic that encourages network members to reduce their consumption. By bringing together ecological citizens who model sustainable living these 'neighbourhood networks' were found to establish norms and values that are contrary to mainstream culture. This is argued to create an environment of peer pressure and competition unique from mainstream pressures to '*consume more and to consume conspicuously*' (p.855). Although Kennedy (2011) did not draw on Social Identity Theory in the analysis of her data, intergroup relations associated with the processes of social identification are deemed to be important element in the maintenance and expansion of sustainable social networks such as these and are therefore a topic of further investigation in this study.

## **5. Implications for Theory Development**

Having conducted a review of the literature covering socio-psychological approaches to sustainability it is now possible to draw out areas that merit further enquiry. These indications will help to inform the direction of this literature review, the development of a theory and the selection of a methodology for this study.

This review began with the rational choice approaches that are most favoured within the policy arena. The considerable number of models that have been developed over the past 50 years indicates that the challenge of directing society to behave in more sustainable ways remains elusive (Jackson, 2005), while the infamous 'value-action gap' remains unresolved. The recent attention given to population Segmentation indicates a growing preference for broader 'lifestyle-based' approaches to environmental behaviour change. Segmentation analyses demonstrate research that takes into account situational, contextual and demographic factors pertaining to individuals' lifestyle choices. Because sustainable lifestyle choices may be exemplified by those engaged in community sustainability groups, this progression informs the current investigation of members within community-economic initiatives. Segmentation research shows that sustainable behaviours are determined by a wide range of factors that should be investigated inductively, rather than through applying top-down models containing pre-determined categories. This contextual and inductive exploration of sustainable behaviour within community-economic

initiatives therefore aims to shed some light on the assumptions made by rational choice theorists with regard to environmental behaviour change.

This literature review has also demonstrated that the predictive ability of quantitative modelling and segmentation approaches has been low, as they fail to explain individual and situational differences. Other lines of enquiry in the field of psychology are better able to identify factors that affect human motivation; namely agency, intrinsic motivation and learning from significant life experiences. Whilst several authors have applied these concepts to the study of sustainable behaviour (Kasser, 2009; Brown and Kasser, 2005; Bandura, 2011), these ideas are yet to result in practical and large-scale solutions for sustainability. These theories inform the current investigation of individuals engaged in practical sustainable activities within communities, which represent grassroots experiments in sustainable living and exemplars to society at large. The limitations of quantitative research on environmental behaviour change further suggest that this research would benefit from an in-depth qualitative approach, looking not only at participants' personal history and subjective experiences but also how they interpret and understand their underlying motivations, which may have implications for both policy and practice (Marcinowski, 1993).

However, the limited impact of policies that focus on individual consumers suggests that individual agents may be unable to accomplish widespread behavioural change without large-scale structural and organisational changes in society. As such, a review of the sociological literature indicates the need for further research that takes a collective, community-based approach. Because practices are deeply embedded within social relations and material infrastructures, social changes arguably require fundamental structural changes in the way people live (Maniates, 2001; Shove, 2003). This line of enquiry accounts for the structural context of social practices, while evidence from established communities suggests that values and practices are indeed learned in social groups. Social Identity Theory informs an investigation of the social processes involved in learning pro-environmental values and practices through group participation. This indicates that building social cohesion is complex, situated and naturally experimental, informing the further study of group behaviour within sustainable community-based initiatives.

However, economic practices have not been a topic of consideration in the studies reviewed here. This is despite recent research stating that income and wealth play an important role in shaping the potential for engaging in sustainability (Huddart Kennedy *et*

*al*, 2015). These indications support the current investigation of economic activity within sustainability groups that incorporate reciprocal peer-to-peer trade networks, including the influence of economic relations on psychological motivation and social organisation. An in-depth consideration of economic factors is a striking omission within the socio-psychological literature on environmental behaviour change. Nevertheless, progress has been made in the emerging sub-disciplines of neuroeconomics and economic psychology to bridge this gap, and these advancements are discussed in the following chapter.

## **6. Chapter Summary**

This chapter has given an introduction to the study of environmental behaviour change and has provided a history of research in this area since the emergence of ABC models in the 1970's. Theoretical developments from these abstract cognitive models to broad lifestyle approaches demonstrate how understandings of sustainable behaviour have broadened. Indeed, this review has not stayed within the bounds of environmental psychology, drawing on concepts in motivational and educational psychology as well as sociology, in order to better understand the complexities in achieving social sustainability.

This has resulted in various implications for the theory and methodology of this study. Lifestyle segmentation approaches support a contextual and inductive exploration of factors relating to sustainable lifestyle choices among community-economic group members. Motivational theories including personal agency, intrinsic motivation and learning from significant life experiences suggest that a qualitative approach is required to supplement quantitative research in this field with a more in-depth investigation of members' personal motivations for participation. Social Identity Theory informs the analysis of social processes and their role in collective behaviour change, while Social Practice Theory suggests that this study should also account for structural contexts in determining sustainable behaviour. The following chapter looks to situate this study within a broader socio-economic context. It builds on the theories developed in this chapter to outline research into new, collaborative community-economic approaches to sustainability.

## Chapter Three

### Socio-economic Approaches to Sustainability

#### 1. Introduction

Chapter Two introduced socio-psychological approaches to sustainable behaviour. These began with rational choice models in the field of environmental psychology, before the review broadened to include a range of alternative socio-psychological theories.

Environmentally sustainable behaviour is arguably incomplete, however without a consideration of socio-economic approaches. This is because economic factors are complexly intertwined with action on sustainability from an international level down to a personal level. Internationally, climate change policy depends on the transfer of financial investments whilst managing the systemic risk faced by global financial markets (Reuters, 2015). At the community level, the lack of investment in small social enterprises working towards sustainability results from selective credit allocation by private banks (Hawkins, 2002). At a personal level, for many people who are marginalised through economic scarcity, the ability to take pro-environmental action is restricted in multiple ways. Indeed, several studies point to social exclusion and lower socioeconomic status as being negatively correlated with pro-environmental behaviour (Martinsson and Lundqvist, 2010; Blomquist and Whitehead 1998, Carlsson and Johansson-Stenman 2000, Zelesny et al. 2000, Jagers 2009).

While poverty can lead to stress, ill-health and addiction, which limits sustainable behaviour (Siegrist, 2000), the high carbon emissions of the most affluent and educated far outweigh their more pro-environmental action (Huddart Kennedy *et al*, 2015, Weber and Matthews 2008, Druckman and Jackson 2009, Lee 2010). Understanding the socio-economic reasons for continued unsustainable behaviour among both the wealthy and economically disadvantaged is therefore crucial in developing viable solutions. For this reason, the study of money as a means of exchange, and our social and psychological relationship to it, is crucial to investigating the solutions presented in this thesis.

Because economics is fundamentally a social, psychological and human activity, socio-economic approaches to sustainability therefore deal with human interaction: how we live and work together, how we value things that are exchanged and how this impacts upon community life and working towards sustainability. Contrary to the problematic disciplinary

divisions within academia, these economic ideas are deeply linked to environmental behaviour change and must be analysed in an interdisciplinary context (Sayer 1999, in Fahy and Rau, 2013). In this line, Guagnano, Stern, and Dietz (1995) argue that 'science and policy require a socio-economic theory of behaviour that incorporates both external conditions and internal processes' (p. 700). They note that the reluctance of applied researchers to merge insights from economics and psychology has led to narrowly defined policies that often fall short of objectives. In the context of sustainability research, the gap between these fields is narrowed: psychological research suggests ways to cope with the negative social and environmental consequences of current unsustainable practices as well as developing new, collaborative socio-economic models. Equally, the investigation of sustainable economic practices builds on the trend seen in environmental psychology, towards the investigation of social groups and the role of existing socio-structural influences on economic and environmental behaviour change (Hargreaves, 2011; Shove, 2003).

The next section discusses how social and environmental crises are related to the global economy and unsustainable credit issuance. This discussion is crucial in clarifying theories regarding economic growth and, importantly, is intended to provide the macro social and political perspective which informs the rationale for this thesis. Section three then turns to an investigation of reciprocity in order to examine the theoretical context of this research in more detail. Concepts that help to address these issues are then introduced in the following sections. These approaches include: the concept of a core economy, design principles for groups maintaining common pool resources, and finally, the diffusion of innovations.

## **2. The Unsustainable Creation of Money**

Globally, the problem of sustainability may be argued to result from the way that *money*, our means of exchange, is created and allocated. All banks are reliant on central bank liquidity because they are insolvent and, in order to make loans to customers must borrow from central and commercial banks that issue credit. In the Eurozone, credit-issuing has shifted from member countries to the European Central Bank (ECB). Like the US Federal Reserve, the ECB is concerned with protecting the interests of private international banks, and can be seen in Greece, as Escobar (2015) writes:

*'Greece's public debt went from private to public hands when the ECB and the IMF rescued private (German, French, Spanish) banks. The debt, of course, ballooned. The troika intervened, not to save Greece, but to save private banking' (in Brown, 2015).*

Currently, the total debt of Greece to private and central banks is €317 billion (Eurostat). Globally, however, the total international debt calculated as of 8<sup>th</sup> May 2015 is \$60 746.3 billion (National debt clocks). This unmanageable, and certainly unsustainable, sovereign debt may be seen to result from poorly managed national accounts, although critically it may be seen as a function of the way in which money is created centrally as credit, with debt. Despite the negative consequences of this system, money creation is a taken-for-granted fact, even within academia. When a Government or an individual makes a loan, the money is not loaned from storage but rather created electronically on the basis of the 'borrower's' promise to pay (Ryan-Collins *et al.*, 2011). As Professor Werner recently concluded in the first academic study investigating money creation, 'the money supply is created as 'fairy dust' produced by the banks individually, 'out of thin air' (Werner, 2014). Indeed, while only 3 percent of money is paper or coins originating from government-owned mints, the other 97 percent is digital or 'fiat' money, created and stored digitally by banks when they issue loans, and thus increasing exponentially in volume (Ryan-Collins *et al* 2011).

Only recently has money and its creation been associated with environmental destruction, spiralling inequality and mass unemployment, and these connections are seldom made in the study of environmental behaviour change. Even among economists, the mechanism of money creation is not often discussed (Bendell, 2015). As one of the authors of the original 'The Limits to Growth' (Meadows *et al.* 1972) report, Dennis Meadows explains that:

*'I did not think about the money system at all. I took it for granted as a neutral aspect of human society. ... I now understand ... that the prevailing financial system is incompatible with sustainability' (in Lietaer *et al.* 2012, p. 1).*

This socio-political analysis is not to discount the traditional psychological analyses presented in Chapter Two, but is to be considered alongside them. Theories that account for the human experiential context and ones that describe social and economic contexts must all be taken into consideration in order to come to reasoned solutions, not least because these macro-economic processes have real and tangible psychological effects on the individual, as mentioned in the introduction. Indeed, personal socio-economic experience is explored further in the following section, providing insights into the



psychology of economic behaviour. But for now it is important to outline the economic causes of 'unsustainability' before exploring approaches to sustainability.

As highlighted, money is created on the basis of interest-bearing debt (Positive Money, 2012). The compound interest on loans also has an exponential growth function, which means that debt grows at an accelerating rate. In order to pay off the ever-increasing debt owed to Central Banks and avoid financial collapse, further loans are made, which increases the money supply, but also increases the debt. New economic activity is required to service these loans, and so this interest-charging system of money creation forces economies to grow, regardless of local contexts. While this may be beneficial to some economies, as a global imperative it is unsustainable.

Among borrowers worldwide, competition for an insufficient supply of money also results in pressure to externalise costs onto society and the environment, which directly results in what may be considered irrational policies such as global trade treaties and unscrupulous resource use down the supply chain, as companies are driven to make greater profits to pay existing debts. This pressure forces the unsustainable consumption of natural resources, and the pollution of the biosphere (Lietaer *et al.* 2012). Natural assets are discounted, as 'money in the bank today can be worth more than trees in a forest' (Lietaer *et al.* 2012).

From a socio-economic perspective it is also clear that deregulated credit issuance by private banks means that they are neither responsible nor accountable for where they issue credit. This leads to a clear preference for development projects that offer high returns, low transaction costs and secure collateral; which means that funding for projects that service the common good such as care centres, free schools and conservation initiatives is squeezed. Monetary scarcity within the public and voluntary sector limits the potential of these sectors to benefit society and the environment, and this is the familiar discourse of 'scarcity' which is prominent within culture (Heshmat, 2015).

The biased allocation of credit by banks also generates mass unemployment, and this is evident in Greece, which has suffered a 20 percent annual contraction in money supply since the financial crisis (IMF, 2012). Cuts in wages and unemployment also result in further social and psychological consequences, preventing people from working for each other, despite the need for much community work to be done. Instead of enabling social cohesion as a means of exchange, money may thus be a restricting force, limiting the potential for community collaboration. Other psychological effects such as depression and overly

competitive behaviour may also be seen to arise partly from scarcity and the fear of which is synonymous with the current monetary system (Vohs and Goode, 2006).

A case in point here is the growing 'housing crisis' in the United Kingdom, now recognised by the UN as a breach of the British Government's commitment on human rights (*Guardian*, 2015). Notably, in the ten years prior to the start of the financial crisis, a 300 percent increase in house prices (1997-2010) was stimulated in part by the creation of £417bn in new mortgage credit by banks, viewed as secure investments (*Positive Money*, 2015). This increase in prices led to a massive rise in mortgage repayments by first-time buyers, from 17.5 percent of salaries in 1996 to 49.3 percent in 2008. In London, the percentage of salaries spent on mortgage repayments rose from 22.2 percent in 1997 to 66.6 percent in 2008. Such high repayments drive money from young first-time buyers to renters and commercial banks who charge interest on their higher mortgages. It also forces those struggling to repay large mortgages into destructive jobs, and long work hours consequently have negative impacts on wellbeing and the time available for community work and family life. The speculative behaviour causing this 'credit-bubble' can be depicted in the following way:



Despite these negative impacts, an analysis of the economic literature concludes that commercial banks are 'forced' to create artificial bubbles such as this housing bubble in order to stimulate fluidity and economic growth. Although this growth profits the banks, without it there would be less money (and debt) to pay existing debts and Bendell warns that this, 'would lead to defaults, foreclosures, bankruptcies, unemployment, depression and, as history shows us, crime, extremism and even war' (Bendell, 2013 p.5).

A clear solution to this catch-22 situation would be national and international monetary reform and in this line, critiques of debt-based money can be found in Daly (2014), Wolf (2014), Farley et al (2013), Jackson and Dyson (2012), Wray (2012), Keen (2011) and Douthwaite (1990). The United Nations Environment Program has also conducted a two year enquiry into the design of a sustainable economic system (2014) and the New Economics Foundation is responsible for a report entitled 'A Monetary Reform for the Information Age' (Huber and Robertson, 2001).

Among the growing number of critical economists tackling this question, the most recent study to emerge is an ongoing investigation by Tim Jackson and Peter Victor (2015) which explores whether a stationary (non-growing) economy with debt-based money is possible. The authors use system dynamics modelling to conclude that it is necessary to eliminate interest-bearing debt to achieve zero-growth. However, not all variables were considered in their model as other incentives towards growth exist within capitalist economies. These include profit maximisation, the pursuit of maximum labour productivity, asset price speculation and consumer aspirations for increased income and wealth. These unsustainable tendencies are at once psychological, sociological and economic in nature, but because they are all reliant on the existence of credit-based money systems, the authors state that:

*'We are firmly of the opinion that monetary reform is an essential component of a sustainable economy...and effort should be placed in transforming this system.'* (p.29)

However, whilst being potentially transformative, such information often fails to reach top economists and central bankers due to an 'information bottle-neck' created by the vested interests of elites (Bendell, 2013). One exception to the general lack of interest or motivation for change at the highest levels is a recent proposal for monetary reform in Iceland by Frosti Sigurjonsson (Greco, 2015). This Sovereign Money proposal suggests removing the power of commercial banks to create money and handing it to the central bank, which would become the only creator of money. However, Thomas Greco, a leading thinker on community economic development, states that (2015):

*'While I agree with much of what Sigurjonsson says about the defects in the present money system, I believe that their proposed centralized 'solution' does not go nearly far enough in solving those defects. Continuation of the money monopoly in (presumably) different hands does not get to the root of the problem. It is my view that the key to achieving more equitable and sustainable economic interrelationships lies in liberating the exchange process from monopolized money and banking, enabling the creation of competing*

*currencies and credit clearing exchanges, and allowing the needs of traders themselves to determine the supply of exchange media (money) in circulation at any given point in time’.*

This statement points to the way in which the current monetary system, rather than being reformed, must be ‘transcended’ within society and culture (Bendell, 2013). This means reclaiming the credit commons, which requires that each individual takes control of their own credit-issuing power and that communities invest their time and energy into those enterprises that enhance sustainability, resilience and wellbeing (Hopkins 2008). For example, business barter networks and mutual-credit clearing systems are moneyless trading networks that have been in existence since the 1980’s and represent the type of interest-free, decentralised banking that would transcend the current system of centralised credit issuance. Bendell (2013) envisages that:

*‘Done on a large enough scale that includes a sufficiently broad range of goods and services, such systems can avoid the dysfunctions inherent in conventional money and banking. They can open the way to more harmonious and mutually beneficial relationships that enable the emergence of true economic democracy’. (p.230)*

This trend towards more resilient forms of economic practice is evident in the growing volume of literature on social enterprises, community investment and corporate social responsibility as well as in the increasing prevalence of the ‘sharing economy’ within popular culture (Morgan, 2014). These attempts to transcend unsustainable economic structures are in line with the theoretical developments outlined in the previous chapter. They situate human agency within communities rather than with ‘monopolized money and banking’, and emphasise the role of small social groups in providing the opportunity for individuals to conduct sustainable economic practices. The following section will now discuss the practice of reciprocity in shaping these new community economies.

### **3. Reciprocity**

In social psychology, reciprocity refers to the situation in which one positive action is rewarded with another positive action or one negative action with another negative action (Fehr & Gächter, 2000). This concept is also studied by scholars, Leda Cosmides and John Tooby (2004) who investigate the cognitive foundations of trade. In trade, reciprocity is the practice of exchanging things with others for mutual benefit, conditional on each other’s compliance (Cosmides, 1985; Cosmides and Tooby, 1989).

The cognitive propensity for reciprocity is argued to exist in humans in the same way as we have the innate propensity to learn language (Cosmides and Tooby, 2004). Specific behavioural responses to exchange are learned, however, and this depends on the

environment, individual differences, and how ones' family and society organise exchange processes. Consequently, our cognitive functions work in tandem with the historic institutions that dictate the 'rules of the game' (North, 1990). These include a consensually agreed means of numerical accounting, a culturally accepted medium of exchange to reduce transaction costs, the division of labour, a rule of law to enforce contracts and punish cheaters, and a system of communicating risks. As the market economy has developed, so our cognitive mechanisms must adapt, and neither can be investigated in isolation.

But what are the cognitive elements of reciprocity? First, reasoning procedures that detect cheaters or 'free-riders' are required, because otherwise, contributing individuals would be open to exploitation and reciprocity as a group norm would not be possible (Cosmides and Tooby, 2004). The very fact that humans seem to have excellent cheating detection abilities suggests that cheating has been a major problem throughout social history (Fehr and Fischbacher, 2003). The specific trigger for negative sentiments toward-free riders is 'willingness to participate towards a group goal': the more willing one is to participate, the more punitive one feels toward free riders (Cosmides and Tooby, 2004). Sentiments that reward contributors, on the other hand, are triggered by 'self-interest in the group goal' (Price, Cosmides and Tooby, 2002). So the more one contributes to a collective action, the more punitive one will feel toward those perceived as free-riders. Therefore, those that are involved in environmental groups can be expected to favour punishing those in the group who do not behave pro-environmentally. Equally those who contribute more towards the state in taxes may be more punitive towards those claiming benefits. Notably, willingness to participate does not predict positive 'pro' reward sentiments towards other participants (only commitment to the group goal does). These findings, which highlight the emotions associated with reciprocity, point to its important role in maintaining a stable group dynamic.

The group goal, and individual's commitment to it, whether this is 'economic development', 'environmental sustainability' or 'social wellbeing', determines who is considered a contributor and worthy of pro-reward sentiments and who is seen as free-riding and worthy of punitive judgement. The high salaries of those working in the banking sector compared to those working in social care may reflect the institutionalisation of pro-reward sentiments that are biased towards the goal of 'economic development', whilst neglecting social and environmental goals. Conversely, punitive sentiments towards free-riding in right-wing politics may be seen as the institutionalisation of reasoning procedures

that detect cheaters among those who actively contribute towards economic development goals. Indeed, during this time of social transition, multiple goals are being negotiated, with social consequences in terms of group membership and the potential for reciprocity that stems from it.

An important factor in determining a person's group membership and their level of reciprocal interaction is trust. Unlike modern cities, small-scale hunter-gatherer tribes lived in close, face-to-face contact. In line with this, modern hunter-gatherer bands usually average fifty people, including children (Lee and DeVore, 1968), and data from modern hunter-horticulturalists shows that individuals usually limit themselves to a small number of regular exchange partners within their larger group, indicating the importance of personal trust and transparency in reciprocal exchange (Gurven, 2002; Gurven et al. 2000).

In abstract modern market economies, however, deep interpersonal trust between producers and consumers is not necessarily required in order to conduct an exchange. Indeed Hoffman *et al* (1998) show that cognitive mechanisms for social exchange are not based on abstract rules but are rather specialised for solving social exchange problems. Rational choice theory is based on the principle that humans use generalised rules of reasoning to make social decisions instead of specialised rules. However, abstract rules do not enable people to detect cheaters during exchanges (Cosmides and Tooby, 2004). Advertising on the other hand employs personalised, emotive messages to win trust and avoid cheater detection. A successful economy, however, requires trust in abstract information and global financial stability, and in many cases consumers may not trust those they are obliged to invest in, in exchange for goods and services. But how is trust reflected in experimental conditions?

In a test conducted by Hoffman et al (1998), participants played a voluntary contribution game that first elicited cooperative responses, before introducing common information that encouraged them to abandon these responses in favour of non-cooperative decisions. Much as in the market economy, this information was not enough to induce common certainty on expectations of behaviour, in a similar way that 'busts' and 'bubbles', as discussed in the previous section, are caused by speculation on common information rather than on certainty. This led Hoffman et al (1998) to suggest that because abstract information leaves behavioural uncertainty unresolved, a further requirement for trust-based exchange is a cognitive mechanism for detecting intentionality, and this is activated through extensive personal interaction. Notably, Isaac and Walker (1988) found that if

participants can talk to each other briefly before making a decision to exchange, contributions to group exchange rose from 40-10 percent to 100 percent as strategic and behavioural uncertainty was resolved. This supports the conclusion that economic behaviour is deeply interpersonal, requiring judgements of intentionality, rather than being based on rational or abstract decision making.

The interpersonal nature of community reciprocity also allows individuals to exercise their agency to influence others, for example, by rewarding contributions or immediately punishing free-riders, which consequently lifts cooperation levels towards a welfare-maximizing 100 percent contribution to the common pool (Price, 2002). Group experiments in economics show that people continuously monitor the state of play, assessing for the presence of free-riders and adjusting their behaviour accordingly (Fehr and Gächter, 2000; Kurzban, McCabe, et al., 2001). However, in situations when immediately punishing free-riders is not possible, participants strategically reduce their contributions. As this monitoring and adjustment process iterates, contributions gradually diminish to the expectations of rational choice theory (Kurzban, McCabe, et al., 2001). In a new exchange situation, however, voluntary cooperation returns. Hoffman et al (1998) therefore conclude that:

*'We should expect subjects to rely upon reciprocity norms in experimental settings, unless they discover in the process of participating in a particular experiment that reciprocity is punished and other behaviours are rewarded. In such cases they abandon their natural instincts, and attempt other strategies that better serve their interests.'* (p.350)

In community trading, individuals can exercise their agency to promote healthy group exchange norms. This is in contrast to the transactional nature of mainstream banking in which the anonymity and lack of social monitoring afforded by great distances may enable free-riding. As contributors to the common good are unable to punish free-riders, personal agency is thwarted, further encouraging diminished contributions and the pursuit of a rational choice strategy (Kurzban, McCabe, et al., 2001). This strategy is particularly evident in the form of 'hyper-consumerism' and the limited contributions to environmental protection and economic reform seen across the globe in light of climate change warnings. The findings above suggest that these strategies emerge as the predisposition to act on pro-reward and punitive sentiments in the service of group goals are thwarted and turn to self-serving interests.

However, national credit has benefits in situations of risk, and in ancient times this medium of exchange was reserved for strangers. Archaeological finds reveal that the

earliest records of money, engraved on stones in ancient Egypt, existed as lists of debts and credits of goods traded between merchants (Graeber, 2011). Money has then oscillated between credit and commodity forms throughout history, today existing mainly as *credit*. These digital transactions conducted on the international market, although reciprocal in principle, are shown to diminish the interpersonal *experience* of reciprocity. Instead, 'money' is experienced as both the means of exchange and a store of value in itself. Vohs and Goode (2006) conducted nine experiments in which reminders of money, relative to non-money reminders, led participants to make fewer requests for help and express less helpfulness toward others. Participants primed with money also preferred to play alone, work alone, and put more physical distance between themselves and a new acquaintance. This suggests that psychologically, money brings about a self-sufficient orientation in which people prefer to be free of dependency and dependents. This behaviour opposes the socially cohesive, reciprocal economics that has been the foundation of success as a cooperative society.

Consequently, Charles Eisenstein advocates for the return to a 'gift economy'. This is based on the idea that interpersonal trust within communities may increase if economic practices were localised and the means of exchange personalised. On eBay, for instance, reputational information on sellers is crowd-sourced from buyers, thereby reducing the risks of transacting with strangers. After the recession in 2009, renting personal assets also became more attractive, leading to the rise of the 'sharing economy': ridesharing, couch-surfing and Airbnb, which has reported more than 10 million stays (Schor, 2014). As economic inequality and monetary discontent grows, this evidence might crucially point towards a transference of trust from major banks and corporate providers to other individuals in society who are willing to provide goods, services and access. Other approaches to reframing economic practices in the context of sustainability are outlined below.

#### **4. The Core Economy**

A large amount of research has been conducted by Gibson-Graham (2006) in communities around the world who are attempting to reclaim economic practice to reflect core ethical values. Their notion of a diverse 'core' economy is depicted using the image of an iceberg. Monetary transactions, paid work and capitalist enterprise are at the tip, and a myriad of sustaining non-market relations are submerged beneath the waterline, namely unpaid labour, alternative non-capitalist enterprises and reciprocal labour agreements. This



redefinition of economic practice locates every citizen as contributing to, and part of, the economy in different and multiple ways, and values all labour as having 'economic value' including childcare in the home, volunteering, caring for elderly family members, gifts in-kind and time-honoured reciprocal labour relationships. The 'economic value' of these transactions is not monetary, but the inherent value of the reciprocal agreements themselves. These represent what is called the 'core' economy (Greenham, 2015).

In communities characterised by distrust and inactivity, this framework questions assumptions that the unemployed are economically inactive and that only monetary relations drive the economy. While public services invest in helping those who are unable to work, the 'core economy' approach values the assets of the elderly and of the disadvantaged. In contrast to the 'dominant needs approach' where welfare is 'consumed' by the needy from outside providers, Gibson-Graham (2009) refers to this as an 'asset based approach' in which communities provide their own welfare through the contributions of members. The asset-based approach aims to mobilise the undercurrent of community resources through ascribing value to the reciprocal practices that happen within communities. Recently, indicators such as the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2015) and the Happy Planet Index (NEF, 2012) have emerged and gained popularity. These aim to measure some of the activities and relationships outlined above, including human wellbeing and ecological improvement in understandings of development (Fahy and Rau, 2013).

## **5. Core Principles for Groups maintaining Common Pool Resources**

The previous theories look to reorient consumer behaviour towards reciprocal consumption and production, or 'co-production', a term coined by Elinor Ostrom and later developed by Professor Edgar Cahn in the Timebanking movement. To achieve more ethical and resilient means of production however, Ostrom (1990) has also determined a framework that connects groups managing common pool resources (CPRs). Together with colleagues, she created a database of such groups across the world.

When the possibility of the 'Tragedy of the Commons' was suggested by Garrett Hardin in 1968, privatization or top-down regulation were seen as the only solutions. However Ostrom demonstrated to the field of economics that, contrary to popular belief, when certain conditions are met, groups of people are capable of sustainably managing their common resources and that the tragedy of overuse can be avoided without privatization or top-down regulation. Given the importance of these conclusions to neoclassical economics

i.e. that individual self-interest leads to societal dysfunction, Ostrom's work was considered ground-breaking and eventually earned her the Nobel Prize in economics in 2009 (Ostrom, 1990, 2010).

Drawing from empirical cases and guided by the emerging field of game theory, Ostrom identified eight core design principles that may be generalised to any organised group (Wilson, 2013). The primary role of the design principles is to explain under what conditions trust and reciprocity may be built and maintained in order to sustain collective group action towards a common goal (Cox, 2010, p.4-5). They are:

1. **Clearly defined boundaries.** *The identity of the group and the boundaries of the shared resource are clearly delineated.*
2. **Proportional equivalence between benefits and costs.** *Members of the group must negotiate a system that rewards members for their contributions. High status or other disproportionate benefits must be earned. Unfair inequality poisons collective efforts.*
3. **Collective-choice arrangements.** *Group members should create at least some of their own rules and make decisions by consensus. People hate being told what to do but will work hard for group goals that they have agreed upon.*
4. **Monitoring.** *Managing a commons is inherently vulnerable to free-riding and active exploitation. To avoid the tragedy of the commons, these undermining strategies must be detected at low cost by norm-abiding members.*
5. **Graduated sanctions.** *Transgressions should be punished lightly at first with more severe forms of punishment set aside for use when necessary.*
6. **Conflict resolution mechanisms.** *Conflicts should be resolved quickly and in ways that are seen as fair by members of the group.*
7. **Minimal recognition of rights to organize.** *Groups must have the authority to conduct their own affairs as externally imposed rules are unlikely to be adapted to local circumstances and violate principle 3.*
8. **For groups that are part of larger social systems, there must be appropriate coordination among relevant groups.** *Every sphere of activity should be governed at an optimal scale, and large scale governance requires coordinating governance activities, called polycentric governance. Subsidiarity assigns governance tasks to the lowest effective jurisdiction.*

The design principles draw, not only from political theory but from the dynamics of cooperation and bio-cultural evolution. Indeed, Ostrom's principles are arguably supported by the cognitive mechanisms for reciprocity presented in section three. For example, a group boundary may be supported by members' explicit commitment to a group goal; a system that rewards members for their contributions is supported by the natural pro-

reward sentiments of members towards high-contributors (Cosmides and Tooby, 2014); and a system of monitoring and graduated sanctions is supported by members' natural punitive sentiments towards free-riders in reciprocal exchange.

Notably, the anthropologist, David Wilson (2013) finds a striking correspondence between Ostrom's core design principles and the conditions that have led human societies to be largely cooperative. This is because, when groups succeed in these ways, the opportunities for some members to benefit at the expense of others become extremely limited, so working as a group outweighs the incentive to apply self-serving strategies. Promoting this cooperation highlights the importance of applying cooperative principles and common property rights to small groups managing common pool resources. However it should be noted that although the design principles are stated in general terms, they are applied in specific ways, on a case by case basis.

## **6. Diffusion of Innovations**

While Ostrom's core design principles are helpful in organising alternative economic processes in local contexts, developing and diffusing these processes more widely is crucial to reduce dependence on current financial systems and affect positive social change. In this regard, Diffusion of Innovation (DoI) theory places its emphasis on innovation as an agent of behaviour change. This is particularly pertinent given the technological context in which financial and transactional services have grown in recent years. This 'fin-tech' revolution includes peer-to-peer lending and mobile payments made with digital currencies. New payment systems that combine digital, mobile and network technologies offer disruptive forms of financial transaction to those of high street banks. As these transactions are carried out in different ways, they could influence the way users understand and interact with money, impacting the way they value, trust and interpret not only alternative financial transactions, but also traditional ones.

Innovative technical infrastructures are therefore acknowledged to be an important part of any transition towards a new economic paradigm, and the way users interact with alternative digital finance could have profound effects on the diffusion of these practices, in personal, business and wider economic domains. According to DoI theory, innovation is defined as 'an idea, practice, or object perceived as new' (Rogers 2003, p. 12), and therefore it is not only the technologies but also new economic ideas and practices that may be diffused within culture. Rogers (2003, p. 15) suggests that behaviour will change more rapidly if innovations are perceived as being better than previous options, when they

are consistent with the existing values, experiences and needs of potential adopters, if they are easy to understand, testable, and their results are visible.

The mass media is useful for creating awareness of new ideas and practices amongst potential adopters. However, when an individual considers adopting a new innovation, they tend to assess it 'through the subjective valuations of close peers' rather than via experts or scientific analyses (Rogers 2003, p. 36). Close interpersonal communications therefore play a key role in persuading actual adoption of a new innovation. As new innovations are developed at an institutional level, however, knowledge is accumulated and stored, forming a 'knowledge commons' or stable institutional field that has a positive feedback effect, enhancing learning and the uptake of new practices. Raven (2012 p.1029) suggests five stages in the institutional development and diffusion of a new innovation:

1. *Creating new expectations and social networks.*
2. *Experimenting with new socio-technical configurations and making them work within a specific context.*
3. *Exchanging knowledge with other actors so that lessons get translated into more generic rules that become applicable across different locations.*
4. *The emerging institutional field becomes a useful resource for experimental projects in new locations.*
5. *Once sustained, cycles result in a stable institutional field which may influence the prevailing regime or become a viable competing practice.*

Although the DoI theory mentions the role of 'social networks', it does not go into detail about the importance of groups in creating the social and psychological conditions for new innovations to spread. Rogers (2003) indicates that communication is most likely and effective when interacting individuals are similar in their attributes, such as education, social status, values, and thus share common understandings, language and meanings (Rogers 2003, p. 306) but this does not account for group psychology, and its impact on economic behaviour.

Social learning plays a role in economic behaviour and therefore in the diffusion of alternative economic behaviour within small groups. Indeed, the conscious identification with and imitation of others in a group reinforces group coherence. Although imitation is not necessary in order to be part of a group, this simplifying heuristic is often conducted automatically, unlike deliberate learning (Katona 1975, p. 50-51). Group-centred belonging and motivation are also important, particularly in small groups (Katona 1975, p. 51). Linking to the process of Social Identification outlined in Chapter Two, when a person identifies strongly with a group, their perceptions of social pressure from that group can lead them to

lose faith in their own judgements and copy the actions of others in their group. While such behaviour may seem irrational in terms of rational self-interest, in group social learning, individuals submit to social pressure, empathize and obey rules of etiquette in order to enhance their status and reputation. As these processes aid the diffusion of ideas within a group, social learning will continue until the majority has a uniform belief system (Katona, 1975).

Small social groups therefore act as reference points determining economic behaviour as well as other behaviours. As friends and associates discuss their beliefs, the information selected is determined by the groups to which the listener belongs. Depending on the group goal, the same mechanisms of social learning can facilitate the diffusion of exaggerated overconsumption or new economic values and practices that are based on reciprocity and sharing.

The Berkana institute in the United States works to support the diffusion of new economic practices by supporting small local groups as 'pioneers and pathfinders'. Berkana's theory of change explains that as unsustainable practices fall into decline, isolated alternatives slowly begin to arise through the five stages of institutional development outlined by Raven (2012), and eventually give way to new movements that become dominant. The interests of those in positions of power are in suppressing alternative practices that threaten their existence, while those leading alternative practices are concerned with winning support. The work of Berkana is therefore to name alternative community-economic initiatives, connect them to each other, nourish them through enabling reciprocal practice, and illuminate their stories so that others are inspired to follow.

This approach is particularly relevant to the thousands of alternative communities that reject mainstream economic practices and adopt more sustainable and autonomous ways of life. Examples of such communities include ecovillages, Resilience Circles, business barter networks, local currencies and thousands of mutual-credit systems that have sprung up worldwide. These initiatives are being developed as they allow communities to meet their own needs without being limited by unavailable funds. For businesses, these systems offer new sources of interest-free credit as well as fostering a loyal and value-driven group of customers. Mutual-credit systems also reduce social inequality as there is no interest charged on the issuing of credit, and by encouraging local trade they reduce carbon footprints and promote local regeneration through the more efficient exchange and use of existing resources (Greco, 2009).

## **7. Implications for Theory Development**

This review has built on the socio-psychological evidence presented in the previous chapter to offer a broader socio-economic account of sustainable behaviour; the implications of which will inform the current investigation. This section discusses the benefits of a multi-level approach to researching and developing new approaches to sustainability.

The literature cited in this and the previous Chapter aim for 'social progress'. This is the idea that societies can and do improve in terms of their social, economic and political structures. The theories of motivation outlined in Chapter Two indicate that social change can happen as a result of human agency. In particular, Social Cognitive Theory emphasises the role of personal cognition in directing behaviour, as well as including proxy, and collective agency at the level of society (Bandura, 2001). Chapter Two also engages with sociological theories, acknowledging that behaviours can be empowered or constricted by social contexts. Social Practice Theory points to role of infrastructures and communities of practice in supporting more sustainable behaviour while Social Identity Theory describes the process of identification that drives collective action. These theories, along with evidence from low-impact communities and 'informal neighbourhood networks', informs the collective, community-based approach to pro-environmental behaviour change taken here.

The theories presented in Chapter Three offer a more comprehensive analysis of alternatives to mainstream economic practice, as a means of enabling social progress for sustainability. The suggestion that cognitive mechanisms for reciprocity solve immediate social exchange problems rather than enabling action based rationally on uncertain and abstract information, reinforces the potential role of the small social group, and highlights the importance of interpersonal, reciprocal economic practice within communities (Hoffman *et al* 1998; Cosmides and Tooby, 2004). Community groups who actively conduct reciprocal practices are therefore argued to provide a valuable topic for research.

In particular, community-economic initiatives including ecovillages and mutual-credit systems are suggested in the current review to be worthy of research, especially given the monetary causes of unsustainability presented in section two of this Chapter. DEFRA's report on Social Enterprises as 'inspirers of sustainable living' (2012), and the financial criticisms levied at the 2010-2015 Big Society Initiative also suggest the need to investigate alternative economic models for sustainability. Building on this initiative, the call for 'dialogue with social partners and those directly affected to plan a better way forward'

(Civil Exchange, 2015) suggests that research could reorient economic practices towards mobilising key assets within the 'core economy', in order to reduce the reliance of communities on scarce bank-issued credit (Bendell, 2013; Greenham, 2014). As such, this review has extensively engaged with emerging literature on monetary reform, monetary innovation and complementary currency systems. By critiquing established economic practices and the norms and values that surround these, the perspective that arises from this literature may be disruptive to the status quo; but instead of transforming established economic and socio-political structures, the initiatives discussed here aim to provide alternative channels for economic practice and sustainable ways of living, in response to the challenging policy context outlined in Chapter One.

In response to these challenges, a multi-level approach is taken here which includes both an individual and a group level perspective. This is because, as well as documenting the personal and psychological effects of membership within community-economic initiatives, it is important that this research remains pragmatic and solution-focussed, investigating in particular which processes and structures are most successful and may be replicated by other organisations aimed at social change. Both Ostrom's core design principles and the DoI theory provide useful theoretical frameworks to evaluate community-economic initiatives. Ostrom's principles help to determine the success of various group policies in achieving sustainability, and the DoI theory is a useful framework for exploring broader cultural and macro-economic processes affecting community initiatives.

The inclusion of these theories supports the notion of a whole 'systems' approach to sustainability; now widespread in both policy and academia, it aims to link social, economic and environmental systems into a sustainable whole (Berkes *et al.* 1998). However, such a multi-level approach has not been widely applied within environmental psychology and little attention has been paid to the practical relationships between individuals, groups and wider contexts in a pragmatic way- a gap that is addressed by this study.

Mixed methods research has gained in popularity within the social sciences as research is increasingly applied to solve pressing social problems that require interdisciplinary action (Greene, 2007). As a qualitative investigation of social change initiatives, it is essential for this study to remain collaborative and inductive, rather than approaching the selected organisations with *a priori* assumptions based on the literature. It is important, therefore, to consult with group members about the challenges that they face in achieving their objectives for social progress and how these may be overcome. This has implications for

the possibility of adopting a neutral position as a researcher, and the epistemological and methodological challenges of conducting a multi-level investigation of social change organisations are discussed further in Part Two.

In conclusion, the socio-economic theories presented in this chapter address the economic causes of unsustainable behaviour, the organisational structures that perpetuate such behaviour and those that might overcome it. Addressing just one of these elements may result in the research lacking practical impact or failing to address some of the broader underlying concerns of this investigation. As indicated in this chapter, research in economics and psychology is beginning to converge in the design of new and sustainable economic systems for our societies, and the current study is able to contribute towards this endeavour.

The two literature reviews have illuminated gaps in the literature, resulting in a number of implications for this study. The socio-psychological theories addressed in Chapter Two imply that this should be an inductive, qualitative and experiential investigation of group members' motivations and experiences. Social Practice Theory and Social Identity Theory emphasise the need to observe group processes, these being the site of social learning and identity creation, as well as being relevant in economic exchange. The implications of the socio-economic theories addressed in this Chapter are that this research might also focus on the nature and development of economic relations within communities, focussing on ecovillages and mutual credit systems. Considering the theoretical frameworks outlined in both chapters, and based on the implications suggested, two research questions will guide the rest of this thesis:

1. How do members understand their experience within the selected groups?

Question One explores group members' motivations for joining the selected initiatives and their experiences of participation within them. Interview data is used to answer this question, with questions focusing on group members' reasons for joining, their most memorable experiences, their relationships with others and their position in relation to wider contexts and issues, including how their views and feelings may have changed as a result of group membership. This question is intended to capture subjective nuances and personal understandings, providing rich and complex themes that aim to inform future analyses. As per the theory and method of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, this question is also open-ended in order to account for the novel and experimental nature of participation within these new community-economic models.



2. What processes lead to the formation, maintenance and contraction of these groups?

Question Two explores organisational and contextual factors relating to the success and failure of the selected initiatives. It is known that community groups differ significantly depending on their stage of development; so by aiming to capture each stage in the development of these initiatives, this question aims to have relevance to other organisations negotiating their formation, maintenance or contraction (Maffesoli, 1996). Like Question One, this question is answered using an iterative research process that draws on both the analysis of group documents and interview data, with questions focusing on group organisation, including the rules of the group, how members cooperate, how non-cooperation is punished as well as members' understandings of the history and development of the groups. This analysis aims to have implications for both theory and practice.

## **8. Chapter Summary**

This chapter has outlined the rationale for developing alternative economic practices as a means of organising for more wide-spread social change. It has built upon the theories introduced in Chapter Two by offering a broader socio-economic context to the study of sustainable behaviour.

This review related unsustainable economic relations partly to the way money is created on the basis of interest-bearing debt. It proposed that a redefinition of wealth and economy is needed in light of evidence suggesting that the development of sustainable economies may be a requirement for sustainability to be achieved. Pursuit of this inquiry led to a discussion on the cognitive elements of reciprocity. Experimental evidence demonstrated that rational choice strategies emerge as individuals' predispositions to act on pro-reward and punitive sentiments are thwarted to become self-serving. This type of economic relation lies in contrast to the socially cohesive reciprocal economics demonstrated in LETS, Timebanks and ecovillages, pointing to these communities as potentially fruitful sites of investigation in sustainable economy.

This study therefore aims to observe and document the type of economic relations that take place within these initiatives as well as how these are understood and experienced by group members. Gibson-Graham's conceptualisation of the 'core economy' contributes towards a redefinition of wealth and economy that describes the type of personal,

transparent and local exchanges that take place within community-economic initiatives. Furthermore, Ostrom's core design principles were outlined in this Chapter as a framework for evaluating the successes and failures of the selected initiatives in achieving their objectives and promoting cooperation between members. As Research Question Two looks at both organisational and contextual factors influencing grassroots innovations, these broader institutional processes were also outlined using the Diffusion of Innovations theory in section six. These theoretical insights inform the design of the research questions and they will be referred to in the later analytical chapters as well as informing the methodology in Part Two.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Introducing the Community-Economic Models**

#### **1. Introduction**

The previous chapters introduced the socio-psychological and socio-economic literature that is relevant to the study of emerging community-economic initiatives. Chapter Two demonstrated a progression from the psychological study of environmental behaviour change among individuals towards collective social models for sustainability. Chapter Three then demonstrated an interdisciplinary approach to collective environmental behaviour change that involves creating initiatives that allow alternative economic practices to take place.

This chapter will now introduce the specific groups selected for this research: Bristol Local Exchange Trading Scheme, Dane County Timebank and Lammas Ecovillage. These organisations were chosen because they differ from stand-alone charity groups as they represent three models of sustainability that have been replicated around the world. As highlighted in Chapter One, these global systemic solutions are aimed at organising community-level responses to the connected challenges of economic, social and environmental sustainability, and therefore represent global ‘social experiments’ in collaboration for local sustainability.

The following three sections will document the history and global prevalence of each movement in turn before introducing the specific organisations. This chapter aims to provide information that will inform the later analytical chapters.

#### **2. Local Exchange Trading Schemes (LETS)**

The first LETS group was established in Canada in 1983 by Michael Linton, pioneering the idea of time exchange using an alternative currency that exists outside of the money economy. The LETS model was then globally disseminated at the ‘The Other Economic Summit’ by London’s New Economics Foundation and these initiatives are now most common in the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand and Australia (Ekins, 1986). LETS was designed to meet two main objectives: to strengthen local economies and empower community members (Seyfang, 2002). It involves the use of a complementary local currency alongside cash, and produces a directory of goods and services offered by its

members. The virtual currency records the transactions that take place between members, and as such, LETS makes local economies more resilient by addressing two failures of the mainstream economy: it provides an abundant medium of exchange and creates a currency that cannot leave the area (Seyfang, 2004).

According to Greco (2001), in 2001 there were approximately 1800-2000 LETS worldwide and in the UK the number of LETS expanded from only five schemes in 1992 (Lee 1996; Williams 1996), to an estimated 450 in 1998 (LETSLink UK, 1998). However, by 2001, Williams reports only 303 LETS operating in the UK, with an estimated total membership of 21,800 (an average of only 72 members per group). Despite a lack of recent data, the evidence suggests that following their rapid introduction, the replication of LETS groups has plateaued as more innovative 'second generation' models such as the Cardiff-based Spice Time Credits have begun to attract wider sections of the population (notably Spice aims to 'engage the many') (Schroeder, 2011). Following this trend, Michael Linton's latest initiative is called 'Community Way Dollars', an updated system that connects fund-raisers, non-profits and businesses through mutual credit.

It may be argued that the LETS structure is limited by its two broad objectives: economic sustainability and community empowerment. With regard to its first objective: economic sustainability, its value-based commitment to non-convertibility means that LETS credits are not backed by national currency and this complete separation from the market economy is impractical for businesses. Consequently, the market for goods and services offered by the schemes has largely remained small and unable to fulfil the economic needs of members, while certain essential skills remain lacking. Secondly, costs are often too high for smaller initiatives and without a long-term source of funding they face a high risk of closure (Seyfang, 2004). Consequently, these initiatives have not achieved the widespread acceptance needed to become an effective tool for economic transformation (Seyfang, 2001; Williams *et al.* 2001).

This may be compared to the Transition Currencies. These are localised tender initiatives which have successfully strengthened local economies in the UK. The Bristol Pound is the most successful of these due to its credible and marketable city-level scale, as depicted in Table One below. Through partnership work, it has widened the reach of the Bristol Credit Union, and the Bristol City Council now also accept council tax and other local taxes in £B. Having launched in September 2012, 750 businesses partake, and 650,000 Bristol Pounds

are now in circulation<sup>2</sup>. As a result the scheme has received much media attention. However, the structural drawback of these ‘Transition Currencies’ is that because they are tied to the economy, their objective is to promote localism rather than reciprocal economic exchange.

*Table One: Scale of some UK Currency Schemes (Bank of England, 2013)*

<b>Paper instrument</b>	<b>Value in circulation<sup>(b)</sup></b>	<b>Population of area<sup>(c)</sup></b>
BoE notes	£54.2bn	63.7mn
Bristol Pound	£250,000	1mn
Brixton Pound	£100,000	300,000
Lewes Pound	£20,000	17,000
Totnes Pound	£8,000	15,000
Stroud Pound	£7,000	13,000

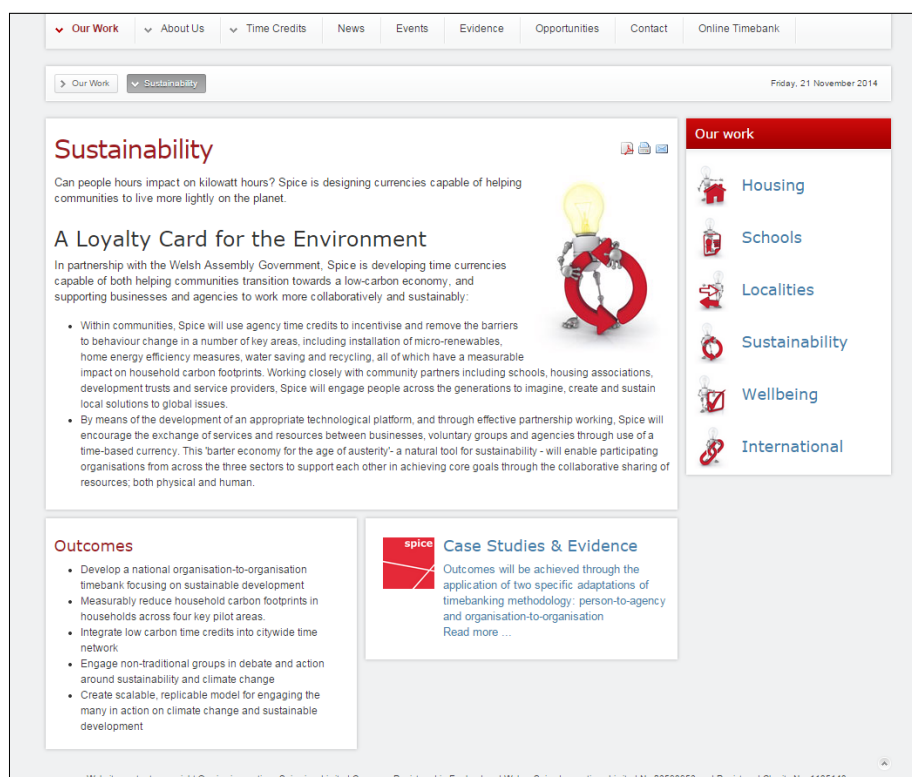
The second objective of LETS, ‘to empower community members’ is approached through mutual-credit, where one credit equals one hour of work. Being separate from national currency, the LETS mutual-credit system provides a closed circuit between production and consumption which, despite indirect transactions, nurtures a culture of reciprocity between members (Schroeder, 2011). While reciprocity is clearly evident among LETS members in the current study (see Chapter Eight), similar practices would not be promoted through a Sterling-backed model (Leitaer, 2014). As a pioneering community-economic initiative, LETS is therefore more successful in its social impacts than in its economic impacts. Indeed, while Seyfang (1997) found low levels of trading and marginal economic impacts among LETS groups in the UK, reinforced by the absence of staple goods trade, she found stronger evidence of social impacts among members, that is, LETS primarily builds social capital.

It may be argued, however, that the broad and simple structure of the model, which only facilitates person-to-person trading, limits its potential for community building. In contrast, Spice Time Credits is a ‘second generation system’ (Kichiji and Nishibe, 2008; Shroeder, 2011). Founded in Wales in 2010, Spice focuses on the co-production of community goals using time credits. With planned outcomes in six areas (housing, schools, localities, sustainability, wellbeing and international), it pursues an evidence-based, outcomes-based

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<sup>2</sup> bristolpound.org

approach (see Figure Five below), which is typical of voluntary social service providers in the UK, and reflects its higher level of engagement within the social service sector.



*Figure Five. Spice Webpage outlining Sustainability Outcomes and Evidence*

As with major social service providers in the UK, impact assessment in Spice is structurally embedded from the beginning, ensuring accountability to local authorities and other statutory and third sector agencies. This reflective, outcomes-based approach was not common of LETS, despite the existence of a few early evaluative studies (e.g. Jackson, 1997). Criticisms raised within these studies did not inform LETS start-up manuals, which were written 'while these systems were flourishing' (Schroeder, 2011). This indicates that LETS practice and theory did not enter into an interactive process leading to the innovation of improved systems, as is the case with Spice.

Initiatives that have built upon LETS have therefore done so in two directions: localized tender initiatives and mutual-credit initiatives. The former are Sterling-backed and look to integrate with and complement the market economy (e.g. Transition Currencies), while the latter retain a commitment to mutual-credit and the co-production of social capital outside of the market economy (e.g. Spice Time Credits). This points to the way that, in the United

Kingdom, Local Exchange Trading principles have been applied to meet more specific social and economic needs.

However LETS and other time credit models currently exist side by side as neither is 'priced out of the market' or forced to close as the cycle of innovation progresses. Greenham (2014) complains that in the alternative currency movement 'decommissioning old models is difficult', however another question is whether LETS *should* be decommissioned. In this respect it is important to consider the experience of those who continue to use and benefit from the LETS system and the niche that it fulfils, which this study aims to accomplish.

The continued perception and role of LETS as a 'social club' (Schroeder, 2011) in comparison to more recent models is particularly salient given that, in examining the profile of LETS members, Williams *et al.* (2001) found a lack of local kinship networks among many members: 95 percent had no grandparents living in the area, 79 percent no parents, 58 percent no children, 92 percent no uncles or aunts and 91 percent no cousins. The majority of LETS members are therefore unable to draw on kinship exchange, the principle source of social support in contemporary society, which is compounded by the low income and unemployment status shared by a large number of members (Williams and Winderbank, 2001). In providing a simple means of social support to more marginalised groups, to whom Spice may be unattractive, it could be argued that LETS therefore still has a place and role in the fabric of the alternative economy.

### **3. Timebanking**

Time-based currency exchanges existed as early as 1832, when the National Equitable Labour Exchange, founded by Robert Owen in London, offered 'Labour notes' similar to bank notes. However, the modern concept of Time Banking, that is, services valued according to the time it takes to deliver them regardless of their 'market value', was popularized by Edgar Cahn in his 1986 book, 'No more Throw Away People'. He applied the principle of 'Time Dollars' to social projects in Washington D.C. in order to address the inadequacy of the government's ability to provide sufficient social services (Greco, 2001). Since its conception, Timebanking has therefore focussed more on social service provision than LETS. Cahn later expanded the model to include Florida and Chicago and the idea rapidly spread across the United States. The New Economics Foundation invited Cahn to speak at The Other Economic Summit in London, and in 1998 Martin Simon opened the first Timebank in the UK in Stonehouse in Gloucestershire. Now there are over 300 in the

UK involving over 25,000 participants who have given and received over one million hours of mutual support (timebanking.org).

Timebanks have now been established in 34 countries, with 300 in the United States (Cahn, 2000). They are also prevalent in Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Taiwan, Senegal, Argentina, Israel, Greece, and Spain (Martin, 2010; Madaleno, 2012). Timebanking operates on the simple concept of one hour of help of any kind given to another member earns one time-credit, exchangeable for an hour of help in return. There is no legal guarantee of the value of hours, no monetary equivalent and pricing only happens to the extent that goods are priced based on the time taken to produce or obtain them, agreed upon as fair by all parties to the exchange. Any material goods needed to complete a Timebank exchange are paid for separately, by the recipient of the service.

While the concept of Timebanking is simple and thus highly popularised, a wide range of different organizational models may be applied to support and manage a Timebank effectively. Although there is likely to be more optimal structures, each is unique to the community it serves. Some Timebanks employ a paid coordinator to manage transactions and to match requests and offers of services (such as the Hour Exchange, Portland). Others select a member or a group to handle this task. Various organizations also provide support, consultation, training and specialized software to help local Timebanks manage exchanges, for example, Community Forge, Timebanking UK, Timebanking USA, Community Currencies in Action.

Several studies have recently been conducted that focus on time banking in relation to healthcare settings (Glynos and Speed, 2012), youth settings (Marks, 2012), within the ageing population (Collom, 2008), in promoting wellbeing (Lasker *et al.* 2008) and social inclusion (Seyfang, 2004). The principal of 'reciprocity' sets time banks apart from other voluntary sector initiatives as a form of *mutual volunteering*, and this works to integrate socially excluded individuals into reciprocal social relations rather than allowing a one-way donation. This act of recognition and reward is beneficial in recruiting and retaining volunteers from social groups that would not normally engage in community participation (Seyfang and Smith, 2002). This includes an increasing number who are unemployed or who cannot comply with the demands of full time work, resulting in isolation and social exclusion (Dwyer, 1998). Paid employment with antisocial working hours or low pay may also lead to exclusion from a local community (Levitas, 1998) and Siegrist (2000) also



suggests that the inability to engage in reciprocal exchange in society through unemployment and poverty, can lead to stress, ill-health and addiction.

A survey conducted by the UKDCA (2007) into the definition of citizenship by different groups, found that lower socioeconomic groups defined the most important citizenship duty as 'being concerned for others' (p. 26). Higher socioeconomic groups included more agency in their definitions of citizenship, such as benefiting 'others beyond one's self and exerting one's influence to encourage social change' (McNamara, 2011, p. 26).

Timebanking enhances feelings of individual agency in terms of citizenship by providing an alternative means of informal employment among lower socioeconomic groups. Mobilizing these groups is arguably the most pressing challenge facing sustainability researchers and policy makers, particularly as 'Ecological Citizenship' is suggested as a practice of the 'green middle class' rather than of society at large (Horton, 2006).

Finally, Timebanking provides a solution to both economic and environmental 'scarcity' because time is treated as abundant and naturally renewable (Cahn, 2000). The freeing of abundance is based on the principal of 'co-production', which asserts that there is more capacity in an economic system than can be defined by the market, which assigns a high price value to scarce resources and a low value to those that are readily available such as caring, raising children, helping a neighbour or volunteering in the community. Despite being the bedrock of the market economy, these roles are not valued in monetary terms, disincentivising individuals from engaging in them (Waring, 1988; Lister, 1997).

Timebanking works to elevate the status of this informal or 'core' economy in order to maximise its abundant social capital more effectively (Putnam, 2000).

### **3.1 Dane County Timebank**

In 1995, 'Madison Hours' complementary currency was established in Madison, Wisconsin. This was a local currency system run as a cooperative to promote economic self-reliance in the city. Paper currency was issued locally and could be traded among members in combination with Dollars, as well as with non-members in order to build the local economy. Stephanie's motivation for becoming involved was that, as she states,

*'I started looking for new economic ideas that don't pit us against each other. First of all mutual-credit seemed like the answer and then Timebanking as a particularly pure elegant form of mutual-credit, so it just seemed perfect. When I read about Timebanking it was one of those head slapping moments, like why haven't we been doing this all along.'*

On 29<sup>th</sup> October 2013 the decision was then made by the board of directors to transfer management and assets of the Madison Hours local currency to the Dane County Timebank, which was established by Stephanie in 2005 with the mission of:

*'Increasing efficiency, opportunity and resource sharing through mutually beneficial exchange-building community ties and self-sufficiency for individuals and organisations in Dane County.'*

The DCTB is currently managed by a board of nine directors, elected every January, who oversee three paid staff members. These individuals offer a range of skills as well as being long-standing residents of Madison. Since its launch in October 2005 the initiative has rapidly expanded into neighbourhoods throughout Dane County including the North, East, South, Central, Stoughton/Oregon and Middleton areas, as depicted below.

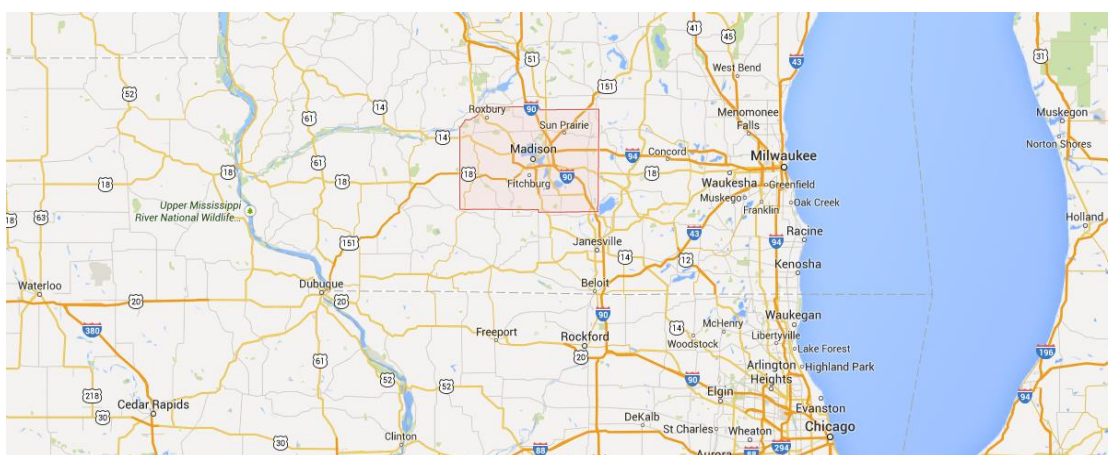


Figure Six. Madison and the Surrounding Area

This expansion is managed through neighbourhood- and program-based Timebank hubs where residents in a given neighbourhood elect their own 'Kitchen Cabinet' (Steering Team), who make day-to-day policy decisions for their local area, host regular social events and organise local projects. Within various neighbourhoods across Dane County, the range of projects created and supported by the DCTB has increased. One example is 'Maxine's Timebank Store' which exchanges second hand items for time credits to meet the needs of the deprived Allied Drive neighbourhood. Although Kitchen Cabinets may have different outreach strategies, they operate under the broader policy structure provided by the Dane County Timebank and determined by the DCT Board of Directors.

The organisational structure of the DCTB is depicted in the diagram below. In the Allied Drive neighbourhood, for example, the Allied Community Co-op incorporates various local projects. These include green carts selling fresh vegetables and an energy project. The Medical Transportation project is operated by ten regular drivers who provide free lifts to

dialysis patients in the Madison metropolitan area as well as in Sun Prairie, Waunakee, Stoughton, McFarland, and Oregon.

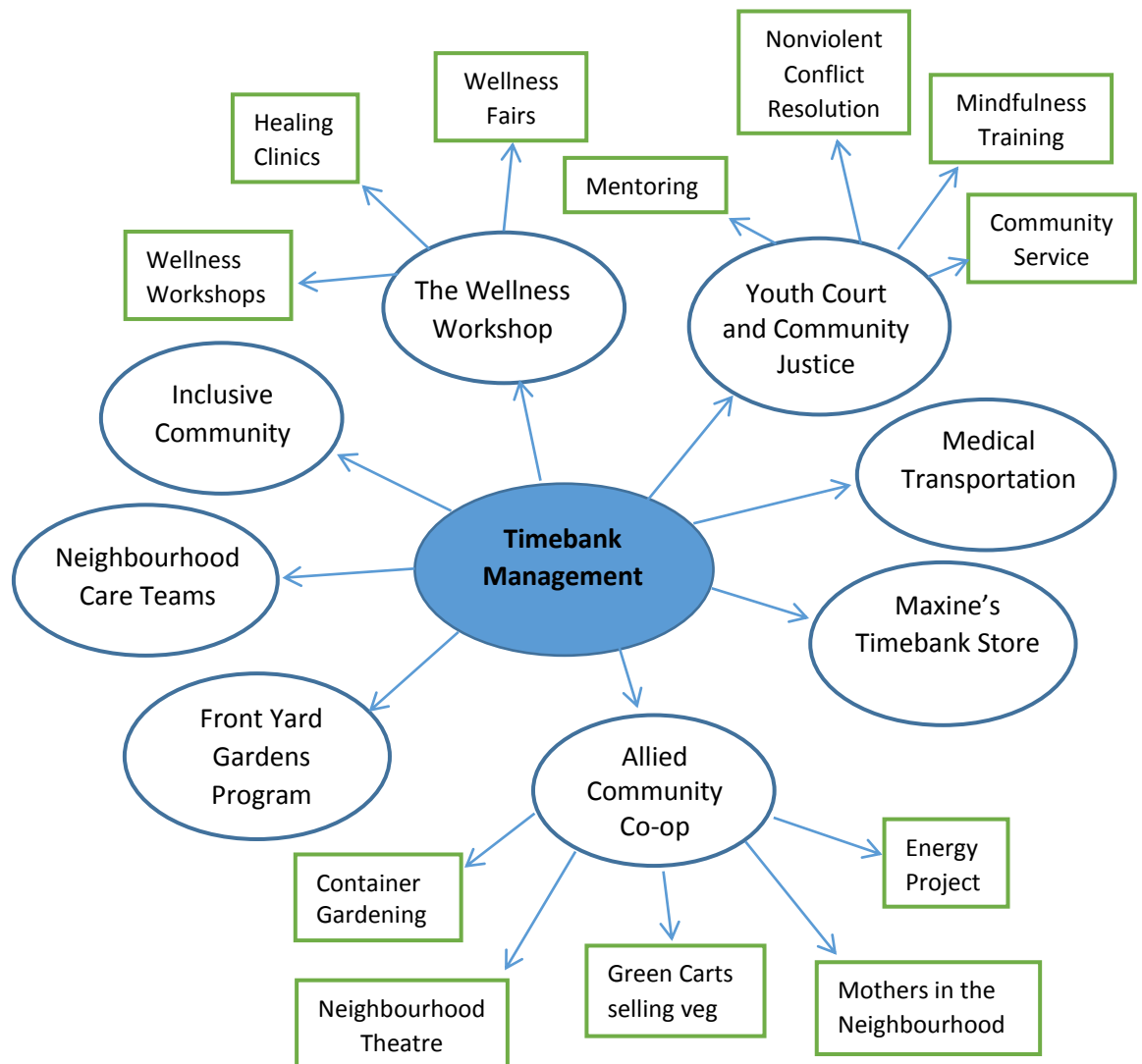


Figure Seven. Structure of the Dane County Timebank

The structure of the DCTB, which is one of the largest in the USA, provides an example of what Stephanie calls ‘applied Timebanking’. This ‘second generation model’ may be compared to Spice Time Credits in Wales (Schroeder, 2011) as both collaborate with a range of public and voluntary organisations through the exchange of time. Through this approach, individuals and organisations are able to share resources in an economically efficient way, as stated in the objectives of the DCTB:

*‘In an era of declining government funding, Timebanking provides a mechanism to facilitate the sharing and exchange of resources among organizations that are often put in a position of competing for limited resources. This approach reduces strain on municipal budgets and*

*human service providers, provides opportunities for restorative justice, and offers a chance for everyone to work together to address community needs.'*

However, in terms of member engagement, regular activity is low. In 2015, of the 2250 registered members, only 200 accounts are active, that is, have done transactions in the past year. These members have completed 1,431 transactions, totalling 6455 hours. This level of activity also shows a decrease from 2014, when 266 accounts were active and 2,706 transactions were completed. As data collection precedes statistics from 2015, reasons for this reduction in activity are not within the scope of the current investigation. However, this level of activity still remains higher than the majority of LETS and Timebank groups, where regular trading communities rarely grow beyond 150 members (Bendell, 2015).

Given this, Stephanie and her colleagues aim to increase member engagement by looking to develop the organisation structure, incorporating different elements of community resource sharing and trade. In a similar way, Spice Time Credits enables person-to-agency Timebanking as a means of increasing membership numbers and activity. For example, through working with housing associations, schools, public service providers, community groups, Government and private organisations, Spice has achieved a membership of 500-1500 individuals, and also works with 521 organisations using Time Credits. Through the development of Mutual aid Networks (MANs), Stephanie and her colleagues aim to create a sustainable 'co-operative superstructure' that connects Timebanking and mutual credit with other types of cooperative resource management, each filling a different, complementary role in economic and community life. The MAN's stated mission is:

*'To create a global network of many-size, many-function cooperatives that take inspiration from the Mondragon network of cooperatives, with an explicit aim that every member can get their basic needs met within that network while doing work they choose and/or create.'*

This proposal essentially differs from Spice as it connects co-operative methods that are only recently emerging in experimental communities throughout the world. Unlike in Spice, these community-run structures exist further beyond 'the realms of state and market' (Scott-Cato and Hillier, 2010). They include Timebanking, cooperative saving and investment models such as the Mission Asset Fund in San Francisco, JAK bank in Sweden, and New Zealand Timebanks' Savings Pools, as well as complementary currencies, cooperative ownership, and other forms of mutual credit. Although in the initial stages of development, the Main MAN virtual sharing platform has already been established and progress towards forming template agreements and legal and financial structures is

underway. These are based on core cooperative principles, governance of the commons, and the principles of co-production.

The MAN framework can be adapted to any size, for any group of people choosing to join together for a common purpose. For example, through its co-operative structure, the Main MAN may support a Wisconsin MAN, a neighbourhood MAN or a MAN for artists who wish to support each other. This fractal design aims to allow the framework to be self-sustaining. For a group of artists, for example, percentage of sales, investment and class fees feeds the money pool (under 'Community Saving, Lending and Investing'), and art supplies and space is obtained from the Resource Pool using Time Credits. This reciprocal process is self-sustaining and supports artists' ability to live off their work. This scenario illustrates the way in which MAN structures and processes are intended to fulfil a greater proportion of individuals' community and economic life than is currently possible through the DCTB. Along with Spice Time Credits, the MAN proposes a more flexible and accessible infrastructure 'to include everyone'.

#### **4. The Ecovillage Movement**

The Ecovillage movement differs from LETS and Timebanking, which focus on economic exchange and social service provision instead of zero-carbon low-impact living, although these alternative economic practices might lead towards such a lifestyle. Ecovillages, on the other hand, are a 'back to the land' movement where members often undertake a physical relocation in order to start a new life living off the land, which involves its own community and economic rules. Because of its more holistic nature, combining economic, ecological, social and cultural aspects, this intentional community model is perhaps the least accessible and most radical of the three.

The term 'ecovillage' was introduced in response to the 1970's energy crisis by Professor George Ramsey at the First World Energy Conference of the Association of Energy Engineers, to describe small car-free developments in suburban areas (Ramsey, 1979). However, the desire for community living emerged prior to this with the communal movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and became more organized in the mid-1980s in the form of cohousing and related alternative-community movements. Then, in 1991, Robert and Diane Gilman, working for the Gaia Trust conducted a study entitled 'Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities'. In this paper they first defined an ecovillage as:

*'A human-scale full-featured settlement in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development, and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future.'* (p.10)

The ecovillage movement then began to coalesce in 1995 at Findhorn's annual autumn conference which attracted hundreds of applicants and, according to Ross Jackson, 'somehow struck a chord that resonated far and wide' (Jackson, Permaculture Magazine, 2004). Many intentional communities then began to call themselves 'ecovillages'. As a result of the Findhorn conference, the Global Ecovillage Network formed, linking small, isolated projects from around the world. Today, 872 projects are listed on the GEN Network in over 70 countries, while many remain unregistered and without record.

In essence, an ecovillage is a human-scale settlement consciously designed through participatory processes to secure long-term sustainability. Each is unique and experimental, integrating various community and ecological values within a principle-based approach to sustainability, such as permaculture (Holmgren, 2013). In rural locations this may involve aspects of ecological design and building, alternative energy, environmentally benign manufacturing and production and community building practices (Bundale, 2004). In urban locations, co-housing groups can incorporate the values of sustainability through communal living, carpooling, shared shopping, childcare, transport and energy systems. Whether urban or rural, ecovillagers are generally united by shared ecological, social-economic and cultural-spiritual values (Kasper, 2008).



*Lammas Community Hub, Summer 2012, photo sourced from [www.lammas.org.uk](http://www.lammas.org.uk)*

In the industrialized North, as well as Australia and New Zealand, most ecovillages are intentional communities of residents who want to pursue a life of Voluntary Simplicity that is closer to nature and more in touch with community values (Elgin, 1993). However, Robert Gilman observes that in the North most communities are not only smaller than

villages (usually 500-100 residents) but also function differently. True villages, he notes, have multiple 'centres of initiative' which include the village governing body and the many enterprises, associations, and projects of its residents. But because most intentional-community ecovillages in the North have just one governing body they function less like true villages and more like what Robert Gilman calls 'centres of research, demonstration, and training'. These small intentional communities are therefore seen as 'seeds' from which true villages might grow.

Two examples of true villages are Findhorn in Scotland with 500 residents and Damanhur in Italy with 1200. In both cases, new and old members have settled on adjacent land and started their own initiatives in order to participate in the community's social and economic life. For example, Findhorn began in 1962 as an intentional community called the 'Findhorn Foundation' which was organized as an educational non-profit organisation. Over the years, 250-300 people have moved to the area, either by renting from the Findhorn Foundation and living onsite, or living in their own homes nearby to be part of Findhorn. These non-members have consequently established 40 social enterprises, businesses, non-profits, consultancies, and other initiatives such as the Phoenix Store, a dairy co-op, CSA farm co-op, woodlot co-op, and wind generator co-op. These 'multiple centres of initiative' benefit both the Findhorn Foundation itself and the entire bioregion of northern Scotland.

In the Global North, higher land costs and more restrictive zoning regulations make it difficult to start an intentional community. Those in the Global South, on the other hand, are mostly traditional indigenous villages whose residents are concerned with preventing environmental destruction, preserving their culture and generating a sustainable local economy. Affiliation with the Global Ecovillage Network is beneficial to these communities, particularly in helping villagers gain credibility, training, and access to resources and grants. Instead of promoting a worldwide ecovillage model *per se*, GEN aims to facilitate the transformation of every village into an ecovillage and every city into an eco-city, that is, to transition society to a low-impact lifestyle by sharing best practice and promoting ecovillage principles. This is achieved through training courses in the skills necessary for low-impact living that may be applied to visitors' hometowns and neighbourhoods in practical structural ways.

#### **4.1 Lammas Ecovillage**

Planning for Lammas Ecovillage began in August 2005 by Tao Wimbush, who created a website to attract members and selected a suitable site location. The first application for

planning permission was made in June 2007 and, after a lengthy appeal process which culminated in a hearing, Lammas was granted full planning permission by Pembrokeshire County Council in August 2009. Residents could then begin sculpting their newly purchased 76 acres of former sheep farm and conifer plantation to be suitable for habitation. What one resident described as, 'the incredible experience of arriving in a field and trying to live in a field from the start', by 2014 was four years into development. At this time the site had been transformed and the edible permaculture ecosystem was maturing, although none of the dwellings had finished construction.

The intention to share the land between 30-35 families was scaled down from 25 to twelve and then to nine. The small size of Tir-y-Gafel: nine small holdings comprising 17 adults and 15 children, according to Robert Gilman, defines Lammas as an 'intentional community-style ecovillage project' rather than an ecovillage *per-se*. Indeed, rather than having 'multiple centres of initiative', Lammas has one central governing body: a Board of Directors, which approves, funds, and manages the community's projects and relations. In these early stages, the initial nine small holdings, known collectively as 'Tir-y-Gafel', acts as a 'centre of research, demonstration, and training' (Gilman, 1999). This centre, registered as 'Lammas Low-impact Living Initiative Ltd' (Wimbush, 2008, p. 411) is intended to be a catalyst, providing the supportive conditions for a larger village to grow, as well as promoting ecovillage practice further afield.

A defining characteristic of Tir-y-Gafel is that, rather than being a 'commune' as many intentional communities are; it promotes the development of autonomous plots. In a study conducted by Tolle (2011) all of the residents are reported to prefer independent to communal living, and the decision to promote this type of freedom was taken collectively during the early stages of development: as one resident stated, 'we're not a commune but an eco-hamlet', pointing to the independence of each small holding. Because eight of the nine plots are nuclear family units, the community structure of Lammas is designed to accommodate for the needs of families, making the family the most important unit in Lammas. This is in contrast to the forms of communal living seen in religious communities such as Scandavale, and intentional communities such as Tinkers Bubble and Brithdir Mauw.

Although there is a common commitment to low impact development, permaculture and sustainable living, each household grows their own vegetables and meals are eaten separately. There is no common dietary practice such as veganism or vegetarianism to



which members adhere, and neither do members unite around a common set of spiritual beliefs. Each member is responsible for their own individual finances and childcare, and expenses are only shared for communal needs such as maintenance of the hydro pump. Finally, the group does not organise regular social activities despite occasional events.

In terms of Governance, Lammas is managed by a Board of Directors, a combination of residents and non-residents, who are elected each summer to steer the organisation. During monthly Lammas meetings, the group's decision-making framework aims to be 'consensus-with-unanimity' but when this is not possible; decisions may be overridden by the Board of Directors. Full consensus' on proposals, as suggested by Tao, requires 100 percent agreement by community members, or 'unanimity' (Kaner, 1996). However difficulties with the consensus decision-making process have led many ecovillages in recent years to move towards sociocracy and related alternative decision-making methods (Buck (2007)).

## **5. Rationale for the Selected Initiatives**

The preceding sections outline the three broad movements and the specific initiatives that will be the focus of this study. Informed by the literature in Chapter Two, this study rejects the on-going academic debate about how best to incentivise individual pro-environmental behaviour. Rather it takes a different angle, informed by the need to approach sustainable practice in a more holistic manner. This approach is also informed by the importance of small groups in creating historical changes in society. Finally, the selection of these groups is based on the understanding that, in order to overcome social fragmentation and environmental destruction, initiatives must address the structural economic drivers of these problems outlined in Chapter Three.

As such, this study investigates those who are already enacting sustainable livelihoods with a view to replicating these socio-economic conditions. As noted in Chapter One, the three organisations were chosen because they share certain aspects that are conducive to sustainable living:

1. They represent systemic solutions that are part of global movements
2. They are grassroots initiatives organising for community level sustainability
3. They holistically respond to economic, social and environmental challenges
4. They incorporate reciprocal, non-monetary, peer-to-peer trade networks

This study follows a preliminary investigation of voluntary organisations in Wiltshire, where the principles of community, reciprocity and democracy were found to be evident across a range of voluntary sector organisations<sup>3</sup> (Smith, 2012, 2013). The current selection is therefore based on the understanding that these factors may be important to the development of sustainable communities and economies, and all three initiatives therefore incorporate these fundamental principles.

The VCS Impact Survey (Smith, 2013) provided an impact assessment of three stand-alone voluntary sector initiatives conducting pro-social and pro-environmental activities in Wiltshire: the Wilts and Berks Canal Trust (restoration and heritage), the Friends of Oakfrith Wood (environmental management) and Alabaré Include (mental health care). First, the current study builds on this investigation by exploring the potential of more widely applicable models of community-economic organisation. The potential for facilitating the type of large-scale civic reform that is required to meet the demands of global energy and resource efficiency lies within the popularity of the organisations studied, that is, each has international scope.

Second, potential lies in the generalizability of the models. Timebanking, mutual-credit and ecovillage principles are tools and frameworks for organising participation and can be applied to a wide range of organisations and settings. This is evident in the increasingly widespread adoption of democratic organisational and decision making models such as 'Holacracy' and 'Sociocracy' within business institutions, processes typically practiced within ecovillages and co-housing groups. Similarly, the range of courses in low-impact design and construction, orchard and woodland management, animal husbandry, growing food, land-based crafts and businesses provided by most ecovillages are transferrable to neighbourhood contexts. Models based on LETS and Timebanking, which enable co-production, have also come into favour as a new approach to non-monetary social service delivery (see page 15). The flexibility of these models is therefore a strength in effecting institutional change towards more sustainable methods of exchange and low-impact living.

Finally, the groups were selected, in particular, as they differ in ways that were considered to be of interest in answering the research questions, which were:

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<sup>3</sup> Please find links to the three-phase study of Voluntary Sector groups in Wiltshire, conducted in 2012-13 as a preliminary to the current investigation:  
<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/communityandliving/voluntarycommunitysector/measuringtheimpactofthevcsinwiltshire.html>

1. How do members understand their experience within the selected groups?
2. What processes lead to the formation, maintenance and contraction of these groups?

While Lammas is in its formative phase, the DCTB is negotiating its maintenance while aiming to expand into the more embedded Mutual Aid Networks. LETS schemes, on the other hand, are reported to be undergoing contraction, following their rapid expansion during the 1990's (Schroeder, 2011). This selection takes into consideration the temporality of community organisations; that many face challenges leading to their contraction and closure while many provide inspiration for others to create new and innovative models. This selection aims to provide insight into processes that influence all three stages in the development of community-economic initiatives: formation, maintenance and contraction. Understanding the group and contextual factors that influence these processes might inform the design and implementation of such initiatives, and as such, these factors are discussed in Chapters Ten and Eleven.

As highlighted in section four of this Chapter, LETS and the DCTB are urban communities using virtual tools of community exchange to build more sustainable community relations. Lammas, on the other hand is an 'intentional' community model that is separated from mainstream urban life in order to achieve not only zero-carbon, low-impact living but also an alternative culture based on sustainability. This difference between Lammas and the other initiatives might indicate how far, and in what ways, Western society might develop in terms of sustainability. The inclusion of Lammas is therefore intended to provide data from a unique, nearly self-sufficient community with its own exchange rules, to both inform and complement that of LETS and the DCTB. This comparison may draw on economic, ecological, social or cultural aspects of ecovillage life.

Differences between the initiatives will suggest limits to the transferability of the findings. These may be experiential factors relating to economic, ecological, social or cultural aspects of group membership, or to group structures and processes. Equally, any themes which emerge as important in all three groups can be interpreted as having broad significance, giving scope for cautious theoretical transferability across a range of initiatives. Experiential detail within these themes might indicate potential directions for the future development of sustainable community-economic initiatives. These indications must, however, be sensitive to the type of organisation to which they apply, and a constant reflection on the divergences between group experiences will inform this sensitivity. A final analysis of the

convergences and divergences between the groups and their implications will form part of the concluding chapter.

## **6. Chapter Summary**

This chapter has introduced the initiatives that will be the subject of analysis in the Results and Discussion part of the thesis. It first served to introduce the broad social movements and the historical context in which the initiatives are situated. Second, it provided a general outline of the selected organisations, their membership numbers, frequency of activity, group relations and other relevant statistics. Finally, a rationale was given for the selection of these community-economic models as a promising solution to the challenges we face today. This chapter has provided an important introduction to the community-economic initiatives that will inform the later chapters and is followed by Part Two: the Methodology of this thesis.

## **Part Two:**

### **Methodology**

This second part of the thesis consists of two short chapters which outline the methodology of the study. The first explains how methodological decisions were informed by the socio-psychological and socio-economic literature outlined in Chapters Two and Three. Not only did this literature inform the decision to study collective, community based approaches to sustainability, unlike much research in psychology; but also informed the exploration of community-economic groups in particular. Chapter Six then describes in detail the procedures that were undertaken in collecting and analysing the data, explaining the rationale for key decisions such as the use of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, and evaluating the effectiveness of the methods used.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Introducing the Research Methodology**

#### **1. Introduction**

Chapters Two and Three have provided a theoretical background to this study, both in psychology and in other fields of inquiry. Within this new and interdisciplinary arena there are many gaps in the literature, which this study aims to address. The two research questions that have arisen from these investigations reflect the interdisciplinary position of this study; a point that is discussed further in this introduction to the research methodology. The research questions that were established are:

1. How do members understand their experience within the selected groups?
2. What processes lead to the formation, maintenance and contraction of these groups?

This chapter describes the methodology chosen to answer these questions. Interpretive Phenomenological analysis (IPA) is used as a framework for exploring group members' personal experiences, and what these mean to them. As such, an extended introduction to IPA will form the main body of this chapter. As this is a relatively new approach to analysing qualitative data, particular reference is given to describing and evaluating it in terms of its advantages and limitations.

First, section two outlines suggestions that emerged from the literature reviews in Chapters Two and Three, and how the implications of these result in three overall research aims, forming the basis of this study. Section three then outlines the research design which is based on a critical realist epistemology and applies a qualitative research methodology. Section four introduces IPA and evaluates this method in terms of its strengths and limitations. Sections five and six outline the evaluative criteria and ethical considerations of this qualitative research, and finally, a section on researcher positionality is included in this chapter to introduce the reflective focus that is taken throughout this study.

#### **2. Research Aims based on the Literature**

As highlighted in the introduction, this thesis was based on the understanding that individual behaviours are embedded within social contexts. Thus, from its conception

sustainability was approached as a collective endeavour, diverging from the dominant focus on individual 'behaviour change' in psychology, to look at the way that communities might organise to live and work in a more sustainable way. A review of the literature then helped to pinpoint further gaps in the literature as well as areas where information failed to cross disciplinary boundaries, leaving sites for new and innovative approaches to the study of pro-environmental behaviour change. These sites were identified, particularly in Chapter Three, with implications for the methodology. Three research aims were developed from the two literature review chapters. These defined the current study as: *an inductive study of motivations and experiences, a study of collective community-based approaches and a study of practical alternative economic solutions*. These aims are now discussed in turn.

#### *An inductive study of motivations and experiences*

The socio-psychological literature supports the move away from models that apply and test assumptions about human behaviour. The failure of rational ABC ('Attitude'- 'Behaviour'- 'Choice') models of policy making within a consumer-focused society, suggests that this study should not be limited to an investigation of cognitive factors only. Instead of building upon the quantitative methodologies that test such factors, this study takes an inductive approach to exploring holistic 'lifestyles', as they are experienced by individuals (Barr, 2011; Shove, 2010). However, because the concept of 'sustainable lifestyles' is found to be 'slippery' as different behaviours are practiced in different contexts (Barr, 2011), an investigation of underlying motivations is merited. As a qualitative investigation, patterns and categories expressed as important by participants are organised into themes that might shed light on their complex experiences and personal motivations (Creswell, 2009). The aim of this study is therefore to achieve depth rather than breadth in the data, in order to understand why a small sample of people choose to engage in alternative community-economic practices and what it means to them.

#### *A study of collective community-based approaches*

A review of the socio-psychological literature in Chapter Two also indicates that the study of individual motivations alone is inadequate: policies which focus on individual consumers have so far failed to bring about large-scale behavioural change (Verplanken, 2011). Evidence that values and practices are learned in social groups suggests that theoretical developments may be made in taking a collective approach that accounts for emerging communities of practice and communities of interest (Bandura, 2011; Wenger, 2006). This

implies the need for a multi-level analysis that looks, not only at individual experiences; but also observes group processes as they occur in natural settings. The methods adopted in this study therefore cannot be limited to interviews and also include group observations and the analysis of public documents, in order to determine group-level social learning, identity and value creation (Bandura, 1989; Hogg, 2001). Evidence outlined in Chapter Three that our cognitive mechanisms are designed to solve immediate social exchange problems, also reinforces a group-level investigation of the small social group and its role in supporting healthy reciprocal practice (Hoffman et al 1998). Because the social function of reciprocity in maintaining a stable group dynamic has already been highlighted in experimental conditions (Cosmides and Tooby, 2004), an observation of these processes within naturalistic settings as aims to fill this gap in both the economic and psychological literature in this field. Finally, the analysis of secondary data is highlighted here in order to determine the group goal and its impact upon the sentiments and practices of members. In this regard, the selection of groups with varying economic, social and environmental values adds analytical power to the study.

#### *A study of practical alternative economic solutions*

The literature on social practices reviewed in Chapter Two indicates that further research into environmental behaviour change should also account for structural contexts. This is supported by Tim Jackson's assertion that:

*'We are guided as much...by the 'rules of the game' as we are by personal choice. We often find ourselves 'locked in' to unsustainable behaviours in spite of our own best intentions' (Jackson, 2005, p.iii).*

The failure of models and initiatives to promote responsible pro-environmental behaviour further supports the claim that practices are deeply embedded within socio-economic infrastructures and that social change therefore requires structural changes in the way people live (Maniates, 2001; Shove, 2003). These findings in the field of environmental psychology support the investigation of structural and practical alternative economic solutions.

Importantly, Chapter Three suggested that for research to have practical relevance, it should respond to the communities already conducting sustainable and alternative economic practices, such as ecovillages, Timebanks and Local Exchange Trading Schemes (Seyfang, 2004; Bendell, 2013). Evaluating these groups involves secondary data analysis as well as discussions with participants and observation of group events and meetings in order



for the research to remain inductive (Creswell, 2009). This multi-level approach considers individual lives within the context of macro-economic processes, social structures and institutions (Spaargaren, 2003); and the methodology is therefore designed to accomplish both levels of analysis in a holistic and practical manner.

### **3. Research Design**

This section will now look at the factors that contributed to the design of this research. These are a critical realist epistemology, a qualitative methodology, and a phenomenological research method. Although underlying philosophies remain largely hidden in the research (Slife and Williams, 1995), just like all social science research, they naturally influenced decisions made from the very beginning of the research process, and so these assumptions are made explicit first and foremost. This section begins with the basic epistemological foundations of this study; followed by the reasons for choosing a qualitative methodology. The use of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis is evaluated in more detail in the following section.

#### **3.1 A Critical Realist Epistemology**

The epistemology or theory of knowledge, which informs this study, is 'realist' because it aims to understand and influence social structures that generate events and discourses in the social world (Bhaksar, 1989). The investigation of 'real' community-economic initiatives is an attempt to determine how communities could better support efforts to achieve sustainability. This implies a realist position, described as:

*'The view that entities exist independently of being perceived or independently of our theories about them' (Phillips, 1987, p. 205)*

Ontologically, this view of community-economic structures could imply an 'objectivist' view on the nature of being. In an objectivist view, community group structures would be seen as external entities that exist independently of social actors and exert constricting force upon them (Bryman, 2001). This study does not take an objectivist stance, however, and Lakoff states this distinction between 'objectivist' and 'realist' views as follows:

*'Scientific objectivism claims that there is only one fully correct way in which reality can be divided up into objects, properties, and relations...Scientific realism, on the other hand, assumes that 'the world is the way it is,' while acknowledging that there can be more than one scientifically correct way of understanding reality in terms of conceptual schemes with different objects and categories of objects' (1987, p. 265).*

Epistemologically, the position taken here is also critical of the 'realist' ontology as it also considers social structures to be built up from the perceptions and actions of individuals; a perspective that is most prominent in the social sciences and is associated with the work of Roy Bhaskar (1978, 1989, 2011; Archer *et al.* 1998). In this view, mental states, including attributes, meanings and intentions, although not directly observable are seen as real, where positivists and constructivists deny this (Putnam, 2000). Causality is also seen as a real phenomenon, intrinsic to our understanding of the world, rather than being simple associations between events or variables in the quantitative sense (e.g. Mulaik, 2009, pp. 63-87; Salmon, 1984). In this study, the 'hidden' mechanisms and processes that produce these regularities are central to explanations, and these are seen as real phenomena, rather than simply as abstract models.

Through a critical realist epistemology, this study is therefore based on ontological realism (there is a real world that exists independently of our perceptions, theories, and constructions) and an epistemology that accepts a form of constructivism and relativism (our understanding of this world is inevitably a construction from our own perspectives and standpoint) (Maxwell, 2012). An obvious argument against this position is made by Smith and Deemer in the Handbook of Qualitative Research (2000). They argue that critical realism is in fact 'relativist' as it accepts multiple valid perspectives, and combining this epistemology with ontological realism is logically contradictory. This is because, they argue, one cannot hold an ontological concept of an independent reality, while avoiding the constraints of epistemological relativism (Smith, 2008; Smith and Hodgkinson, 2005). Lincoln and Guba call this argument the 'ontological/epistemological collapse,' where theories of knowledge and theories of reality are assumed to be reflections of each other rather than separate contributions to understanding (Lincoln and Guba, 2000, pp. 175-176).

Critical realists reject this collapse of the distinction between ontology and epistemology (Bhaskar, 1989, p. 185; Campbell, 1988, p. 447). Scott (2000, p. 3) referred to this ontological-epistemological conflation as the 'epistemic fallacy'. Maxwell (2012) also argues that, not only is ontological realism compatible with epistemological constructivism, but ontology has important implications for research independent of epistemology, not just as foundational premises that govern or justify qualitative research, but as resources for doing qualitative research (Maxwell and Mittapalli, 2010). An implication of critical realism for this research is that it asks ontological questions about the phenomena under study (Lawson, 2003; Tilly, 2008). If concepts such as groups and social systems are referred to as being real phenomena, it asks: what is the nature of these phenomena? As expressed in

Chapters Two and Three, this ontological position has led to a wider and deeper questioning of micro and macro social phenomena. This questioning would not be justified if such phenomena were not considered to be real.

The implications of a more relativist epistemology to the collection and analysis of data is that any discoveries made must be seen as a function of the relationship between the researcher and the subject (Larkin *et al.*, 2006). Identifying the researcher as an inclusive part of the world they are describing is in line with the Phenomenological stance to be discussed in the following section, and this understanding implies that research must be a highly reflective process because the choice of approach and questions asked influences the encounter, and this shapes the emergent 'reality' of the findings (Smith *et al.*, 2009). These choices are not arbitrary but are based on the literature, while IPA was chosen as the most sensitive and responsive method of data collection and analysis. As highlighted, this process of causation within the research is acknowledged within the critical realist paradigm.

A final and important point regarding epistemology is that Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis is historically rooted in a critical realist paradigm (Fade, 2004). Dreyfus (1995) describes Heidegger, one of the founders of Phenomenology, as a 'minimal hermeneutic realist'. Although this is a rather complex philosophical position, it is captured in the following statement by Heidegger:

*'What is real is not dependent on us, but the exact meaning and nature of reality is'. (p.107)*

The epistemology underlying this study therefore recognises that although certain things exist even without the presence of humans, questions about their nature and reality can only arise because we are here to ask those questions. It agrees with Heidegger that nothing is revealed, whether physical or metaphysical, until we encounter it and it is brought meaningfully into the context of human life (Polt, 1999). This is in alignment with Heidegger's view of the human as always a 'person-in-context'. We cannot jump out and assume an objective perspective because we are always-already 'out there' in a meaningful world. Just as we can only be understood through our meaningful involvements with the world, we can only understand the world meaningfully as a function of our involvements with it (Smith *et al.*, 2009).

### 3.2 A Qualitative Methodology

The decision to use a qualitative methodology in this study was based on suggestions in the literature, as well as on the research aims outlined in section two. This section explains the reasons for this choice, as opposed to the quantitative methodology, in more detail.

The benefit of quantitative, cross-national investigations is that they give greater visibility and legitimacy to the alternative economic networks studied, identify policy needs and inform national level programmes to support community initiatives. These mechanisms are, however, subject to certain inherent limitations: firstly, of simplifying complex social phenomena into numerical terms and secondly, of aggregating local impacts to produce national and cross-national statistical data. They therefore lack the capacity to explore in depth the internal mechanisms and complex processes that group members are involved in. Inductive studies such as this, on the other hand, supplement statistical economic data on community-economic initiatives by capturing a fuller and more accurate picture of groups' unique impacts as well as the motivation for participation including the values and attitudes of members, which cannot be captured using quantitative methods. Therefore the first reason for taking a qualitative approach is that it is most appropriate to this: *an inductive study of motivations and experiences*.

As noted in Chapter Two, much past research into environmental behaviour change has also been quantitative (as argued by Marcinowski, 1993; Hungerford and Volk, 1990). Despite decades of work in developing cognitive behavioural models, these methods have failed to adequately account for individual and situational differences (Gough, 1999; Chawla, 1998), and policies have consequently failed to reduce the value-action gap (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002). This has called into question the effectiveness of quantitative methods in predicting environmental behaviour through identifying the collective strength of multiple variables. Indeed, as the number of factors predicting behaviour increased, the predictive ability and real-world application of the models reduced (Jackson, 2005).

Studying the personal histories of environmentalists, scholars of environmental education have pointed to the meanings individuals ascribe to their life experiences and the impact of these on environmental sensitivity (Myers, 1997). This indicates that the factors determining intrinsic motivation may be more personal and complex than can be examined using quantitative methods. In studying those who have adopted sustainable lifestyle choices, an in-depth qualitative approach is better able to capture complex personal

histories, subjective experiences and the way individuals interpret and understand their underlying motivations.

A second reason for choosing a qualitative methodology is that this is: *a study of collective community-based approaches and a study of practical alternative economic solutions*. It therefore draws on sociological approaches to gain a better understanding of these community approaches as means of promoting holistic social change. Quantitative experimental and quasi-experimental designs are not suitable for studying the complexity and dynamic nature of these community change initiatives because such designs were created to control and predict. However, the political, social, and economic environments in which these efforts occur are often unpredictable (Patton, 2011). Furthermore, there are often more variables to consider in the analysis, such as community characteristics and interactions among these characteristics, than there are individual cases (Stoecker, 2005). Probability testing is therefore neither rational nor possible in capturing the complexities within single group cases. In line with the epistemological standpoint, and to account for the uniqueness of both individuals and organisations, this study is therefore able to benefit more from an inductive research process in which questions, procedures and general themes emerge; and findings build on those emerging themes (Creswell, 2009).

#### **4. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis**

Having established that a qualitative methodology was appropriate, a suitable strategy of enquiry was then needed to answer the research questions. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was chosen as a method of inquiry that would meet the objectives above. This section introduces IPA and outlines its main advantages as an interview and textual method, before considering potential challenges.

##### **4.1 Advantages of IPA**

Although it is a relatively new methodological approach, in recent years Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis has become increasingly popular in the social sciences (Larkin et al. 2006; Smith et al. 2009). It is a qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their own life experiences. This is explained by Edmund Husserl, one of the founders of phenomenology:

*'Through reflection, instead of grasping simply the matter straight-out, the values, goals and instrumentalities, we grasp the corresponding subjective experiences in which we 'become conscious' of them, in which (in the broadest sense) they 'appear'. For this reason, they are called 'phenomena', and their most general essential character is to exist as the*

*'consciousness of' or 'appearance of' the specific things, thoughts (judged states of affairs, grounds, conclusions), plans, decisions, hopes, and so forth.'* (Husserl, 1927 cited in Larkin, 2009 p.12)

Although IPA has its roots in late nineteenth century Phenomenology, it has a short history as a distinct method of inquiry. It first crystallised in the United Kingdom with a publication by Jonathan Smith (1996) entitled *'Beyond the divide between cognition and discourse'*. This paper argued for a qualitative approach to psychology which could capture the experiential whilst remaining relevant to mainstream cognitive psychology. The aim, according to Larkin et al. (2009) was to:

*'Revive a more pluralistic psychology as envisaged by William James...that recognises the important, if suppressed role of the experiential within the intellectual history of psychology'. (p.4)*

Much of the early work in IPA in the mid-1990's was in health psychology, but since then has been adopted much more widely in social and applied psychology, among researchers who are interested in the human predicament and ways to affect social change through human experiential engagement with the world. This is reflected in recent publications such as Todd *et al* (2010), Rizq and Target (2008) and Millward (2006). Highlighting its applications, Larkin et al. (2009) therefore argue that a great strength of IPA is its interpretative range and flexibility, and it is through this aspect of analysis that IPA can engage with other forms of knowledge. This flexible approach to knowledge is particularly useful in meeting the three aims upon which this study is based: an inductive study of motivations and experiences, of collective community-based approaches, and of practical alternative economic solutions.

IPA's roots in the phenomenological study of experience means that it is particularly appropriate in addressing the first objective: looking at participants' motivations and experiences of community group membership. According to Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009 p.2),

*'IPA researchers are particularly interested in what happens when the everyday flow of lived experience takes on a particular significance for people.'*

They explain that we are constantly caught up in the everyday flow of experience, but as soon as we become aware of what we are doing we have what can be described as 'an experience' (Dilthey, 1976), and this may be more or less significant depending on many factors. When people are engaged with a significant experience, they reflect on that

significance and what it means for them. IPA research aims to engage with these reflections to find common strands of meaning.

IPA's phenomenological foundation is based on the work of four major philosophers: Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre. The contribution of each offers advantages for this study. For example, in his attempts to construct a philosophical science of consciousness, Husserl urged phenomenologists to 'go back to the things themselves' and in IPA, the researcher does this by attempting to understand participants' experiences through their eyes, without making any assumptions or using any abstract categories (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Through his concept of *intentionality*, Husserl's also described an intentional relationship between awareness and the object of one's awareness. This notion is implicit in the theories of motivation and personal agency outlined in Chapter Two (Bandura, 1989). Heidegger's concept of intersubjectivity and his view of the person as always a worldly 'person in context' emphasises our relational nature and supports the investigation of collective community-based initiatives as the focus of study in this thesis. These examples suggest that the philosophical foundations of phenomenology are aligned with the theoretical foundations of this study.

Drawing on the work of Merleau-Ponty, environmental phenomenology or 'ecophenomenology' has also emerged in the last few decades as a novel method for understanding the human place in nature. Rich descriptions allow for the rediscovery of our perceptual, embodied, and intersubjective interactions with our surrounding world. This opens researchers to dimensions of nature's meaning and value that habitual ways of conceptualizing environmental problems tend to obscure (Toadvine, 2005). The result is a more robust understanding of nature, our place within it, and our ethical obligations toward it. Stefanovic (1994) suggests that ecophenomenology may help us regain a sense of the 'grace of nature', in which we emerge from and return to a 'self-emerging' natural world (p.76). Merleau-Ponty's focus on the physical and perceptual aspects of phenomenal experience therefore has implications for the study of participants' relationships to the natural world, their sensuous experiences and the meanings they ascribe to those experiences.

The first main advantage of IPA as a research method is that its phenomenological aspect equips this research method to answer Research Question One: How do group members understand their experience within the selected initiatives? The phenomenological aspect reflects the literature on this topic. For example, environmental education scholars point to

the importance of significant life experiences in developing environmental sensitivity, and IPA may therefore be sensitive and responsive enough to uncover the meanings associated with them. As noted in Chapter Two, 34 percent of respondents named a single most important influence as contributing to their environmentalism, while 49 percent mentioned outdoor experiences in childhood (Palmer, 1993). Although these causal findings are interesting, the majority are based on quantitative surveys (Hungerford and Volk, 1990). Consequently, several studies have pointed to the need to investigate participants' 'inner needs and interests' (Cromwell, 1988; Chawla, 1998). In environmental education, Myers (1997) noted the importance, not only of knowing the experiences that people have had, but also how their significance becomes constructed. He argued that it is these constructions and the process of meaning-making that contributes towards developing environmental sensitivity and eventually a pro-environmental lifestyle. IPA is the most appropriate means of inquiry for this task as it aims to capture the meaning created as participants engage in thinking, feeling and reflecting upon the experiences that are significant to them.

Another potential method for this study was Discourse Analysis (e.g., Potter and Wetherell 1987), and it is on this point that IPA diverges. Although both research methods examine language and it is impossible to do IPA without analysing discourse, the methods stem from different historical disciplines. Discourse Analysis has emerged from Foucault and poststructuralist analyses of individual texts, while IPA is an epistemological stance whereby, through careful and explicit interpretative methodology, it becomes possible to 'access an individual's cognitive inner world' (Biggerstaff and Thompson, 2008, p. 216). IPA shares this central concern of 'cognition' with cognitive psychology and clinical psychology (Fiske and Taylor, 1991). However, IPA strongly diverges from mainstream psychology in deciding how thinking can best be studied. Mainstream psychology is still strongly committed to a quantitative and experimental methodology, while IPA employs in-depth qualitative analysis where, unlike in Discourse Analysis, the researcher must appeal to something beyond the text to determine the contents of cognition. Chapman and Smith (2002) explain the conventional distinction between IPA and Discourse Analysis, and this is worth citing at length to illustrate the choice of IPA over Discourse Analysis in this study:

*'Discourse Analysis, as conceived in contemporary social psychology, is generally sceptical of the possibility of mapping verbal reports onto underlying cognitions, and attempts, rather, to elucidate the inter-active tasks being performed by verbal statements, how those tasks are accomplished and the linguistic resources drawn on. IPA, by contrast, is concerned with understanding what the respondent thinks or believes about the topic under*



*discussion. Thus IPA focuses on thoughts and beliefs- cognition or metacognition- while Discourse Analysis is concerned, on this account, with the interview texts themselves.'* (p.126)

This distinction is particularly important in the choice of IPA for this study. In answering Research Question One (How do members understand their experience within the selected groups?) IPA enables the qualitative investigation of 'thoughts and beliefs- cognition or metacognition' that might shed some light on the motivations and meanings participants ascribe to their group membership. As participants engage in their significant experiences, their multidimensional response to the experience comes to the fore, including embodied, cognitive, affective and existential concerns (Larkin et al. 2009). IPA allows the analysis of these dimensions, in both individual and in group contexts. Foulcauldian Discourse Analysis and Discursive Psychology look to understand how people use discourse to interactive ends, and how language functions in specific contexts, that is, the focus is performative. IPA is therefore favourable to Discourse Analysis due to its focus on 'meaning'.

A second important point is that IPA is an interpretive method, requiring the researcher to be highly reflective about their position and assumptions in order to analyse the meaning of texts and interviews fairly. As the participant tries to make sense of their experience, it is the researcher's task to get close to their personal world. However, IPA recognises that one cannot do this directly or completely because access to a participant's experience is always dependent on what they chose to tell, as well as on the researcher's own interpretations. In order to minimise the intrusion of the prior assumptions, IPA draws on Husserl's 'phenomenological method' in which the researcher 'brackets' or puts aside their taken-for-granted knowledge about the world (Nieswiadomy, 1993). From the hermeneutic tradition, Heidegger (1962/27 in Smith, 2009) also explains:

*'Our first, last and constant task in interpreting is never to allow our...fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out the fore-structures in terms of the things themselves' (p. 195).*

Thus, the second main advantage of IPA for this study is that it is based on Hermeneutics- the theory of interpretation. It is this philosophical tradition that equips IPA to answer Research Question Two: *What processes lead to the formation, maintenance and contraction of these groups?* Originally used in the interpretation of Biblical texts, hermeneutics has since become the philosophical underpinning for the interpretation of wide range of literature. The concerns of hermeneutics are: to be explicit about the

purpose of the interpretation, to uncover the true intentions of the author, and to determine the contexts in which the text is written and interpreted (Larkin et al. 2009).

While Discourse Analytic methods focus on explicit meanings within texts, hermeneutic analysis claims that meaningful insights are possible which exceed the texts themselves to comment on the author-in-context (Schleiermacher, 1998). This holistic view of interpretation agrees with Heidegger's concept of 'intersubjectivity', requiring the researcher to 'bracket out' their taken-for-granted assumptions in order to interpret well. To do this, the researcher must first focus on the new object of study rather than on their preconceptions. This is because it is only in light of the new material that the researcher is able to make sense of their relevant bias. Gadamer (1990) acknowledges that this type of bracketing is only ever partial because the phenomenon under study influences the interpretation, resulting in new conceptions which again influence the interpretation.

This is the method that will be adopted in answer to Research Question Two. Its particular advantage is that it allows for the analysis of textual documents relating to the community-economic initiatives being studied. The goal is to interpret these texts in order to achieve a full and contextual understanding of the initiatives. The first concern of hermeneutics is 'to be explicit about the purpose of the interpretation' and the purpose of Research Question Two is to produce a measured and fair interpretation of both the strengths and weaknesses of the groups in question. In IPA this is achieved by explicitly stating pre-constructions and outlining the group contexts. In this way, the purpose of Question Two is to be 'solution focussed'. Given the literature presented in Chapter Three, the role of the researcher is to apply the perspective of the initiative, or as the second hermeneutic concern states, 'to uncover the true intentions of the author' and the advantage of IPA is that this process of interpretation is possible using the methods outlined above. According to Bluhdorn (2002, p. 42):

*'The realisation that ecological problems are in fact 'human inventions' has 'initiated a shift of sociological interest: away from the physical conditions towards the social mechanisms of problem construction and the "cultural dispositions" on which they rely'.*

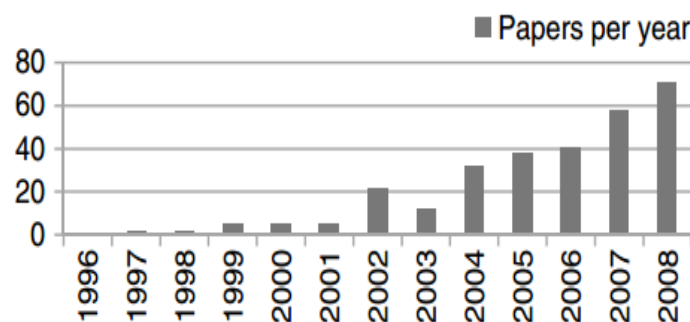
Finally, the phenomenological reflections of individual group members or 'case studies' informs the interpretations made with regard to Research Question Two through a process of Analytic Induction (Hammersley, 1989; Robson, 1993). This was specified as part of the first aim of the methodology. Analysis proceeds with a tentative hypothesis, about group maintenance for example, which is tested against each one of the cases in turn and the hypothesis is revised. This iterative analysis allows the interpretations to be reflected upon

and refined until they apply to the maximum number of cases. The third and final advantage of IPA for this study is therefore that it is 'ideographic', allowing the move from single cases to more general statements to be possible, while retaining the particular claims of any individuals involved (Larkin et al. 2009)

Together, these advantages suggest that Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis is able to meet all three methodological aims laid out in section two and is a suitable method of choice. The way in which IPA is implemented will be outlined in Chapter Six.

#### 4.2 Limitations and Challenges of IPA

IPA has only recently become popular as a research method, and so it is limited by a relatively short history and therefore a small number of key texts and evaluative guidelines. Larkin et al (2009) comment that IPA researchers, predicting criticism from their quantitative colleagues, have consequently been cautious in their research designs. They observe that as the discipline matures, research expertise and standardisation will rise. The increase in publications following the first paper by Smith and Larkin (1996) is indicated in the following graph, adapted from Smith (2011). This growing popularity and scope to explore within this new discipline suggests IPA to be an interesting choice of method for this study.



*Figure Eight. Number of IPA papers published each year*

The majority of these studies have been conducted in English-speaking countries and, unlike in quantitative research, IPA as an intensive language-based qualitative approach will not have a universal symbolic system that transcends culture. In line with the reflective nature of IPA it is therefore important to remain aware of the Western cultural context in which this study is likely to have the most relevance.

It is also worth noting that IPA is most popular in the field of health psychology, where illness experience accounts for 24 percent of new studies published. A large part of the

literature on IPA is therefore geared towards the evaluation of single case studies or very small samples. Smith (2004, p. 51) argues that 'the idiographic commitment to the case' is central to IPA. Single cases are therefore argued to have special relevance in health psychology as they address concerns relating to preserving the richness of individual accounts (Collins and Nicolson, 2002). However, the idiographic focus, whilst being valid within health psychology is less applicable to this study of community-economic initiatives with a larger sample of fifteen participants: five per group. Larkin et al. (2009) recommend a sample of between three and six participants in total for a Master's level IPA study. The authors acknowledge, however, that:

*'It is more difficult to give a number for PhD studies which are obviously on a different scale. Without prescribing this, we often think of a PhD as being made up of three self-contained but related studies' (Larkin et al., 2009, p.52).*

This thesis, which is comprised of three separate but related group studies each with five cases, is therefore considered to be within an acceptable scope for a PhD project applying IPA as a research method.

The limitation suggested above is that IPA has traditionally stemmed from health psychology rather than environmental psychology. Where these topics converge, however, is that they are both concerned with describing an experience which is of some existential importance to participants. Indeed, Smith (2011) found that fourteen studies in occupational psychology used IPA between 1996-2008, as well as five investigating religion/spirituality. A further search for IPA studies investigating environmental behaviour change indicates that the majority of these were published later than 2008 (Mikadze, 2015; Logie-Maclver et al. 2012, Andriotis, 2009; Hinds, 2011). Larkin et al. (2009) also note that IPA has become more popular among applied social scientists, and in an analysis of 54 studies on social learning in resource management Rodela (2012) concludes that:

*'Researchers using a social learning perspective to study resource issues tend to choose methodologies that allow for in-depth descriptions, for meaning making and enquiry as a form of action'. (p.1)*

This suggests that, despite its roots in health psychology and the study of individual cases, IPA is becoming more popular in applied social science research and is an appropriate choice for this study.

It is important to note, however, that because IPA studies are usually conducted on relatively small sample sizes, researchers are warned that larger samples must be

accompanied by a large number of extracts from participants to illustrate the variation in response. They should also aim to provide an indication of prevalence of each theme as well as discussing similarities and differences across cases (Smith, 2011). These indications of prevalence are outlined in Chapter Six. The richness of individual accounts is also retained in IPA through the process of analytic induction and a full engagement with the hermeneutic circle, as described previously, and this must be conducted with care to maintain the 'voice' of individual cases within the whole (Collins and Nicolson, 2002).

Multi-level studies which aim to combine detailed accounts of participants' shared experience with the analysis of documents, have been criticised for failing to demonstrate an enriched understanding. For example, they often fail to successfully embellish each set of findings with the other; and findings are often presented as juxtaposed and separate (Feilzer, 2010). While this mixing of individual and group-level findings has practical impact, within academic reporting, the issue of bridging the ontological divide between objectivism and constructivism is argued to emerge when constructing a mixed narrative (Bryman, 2001; Smith and Deemer, 2000). As noted in section 3.1 on epistemology, rather than separating the 'objective' from the 'subjective', a critical realist epistemology demands both the researcher and audience to flick between subjective and objective frames of reference through a process of 'intersubjectivity' (Morgan, 2007, p.71). Lincoln and Guba (cited in Burke Johnson et al. 2007, p.128) also describe how this dichotomy is overcome by weaving supplementary findings through story-like narratives that describe each case study in-depth. The advantage of using multiple sources of evidence also offers a way of developing converging lines of inquiry, doing triangulation and reducing potential problems of validity (Healy and Perry, 2000).

It should be noted that the contextual accounts of IPA cannot make objective claims about the nature of material phenomena or causal relations. Indeed, this comparative case study design is intended to provide an in-depth rather than a broad-based insight into the processes and outcomes of community organisations (Stoecker, 1991). The exact scope and applicability of these findings is related to the inductive logic of IPA. Cases and accounts are held to be local and so analyses are dealt with in detail and in context. The claims that are made can only aim for 'theoretically transferability' rather than being empirically generalizable across populations. The process of theoretical transferability requires the analyst to provide a rich, transparent and contextualised analysis. The reader is then required to make links between the IPA study, their own experience and claims in the literature in order to evaluate the transferability of the findings and the light they shed on

the broader context (Larkin et al. 2009). Thus it can be argued that IPA has much to contribute to our understanding of phenomena through a focus on the particular which can help to illuminate the universal (Warnock, 1987).

While the process of theoretical transferability is common and intuitive, this along with qualitative research in general, is criticized for suffering from subjectivity and bias (Nachmias and Nachmias, 1981). In particular, IPA researchers may find it difficult to 'bracket out' their own phenomenological experiences. In looking for themes that are shared by all the participants, once identified, the themes may shape the direction of the analysis. A lack of proper reflective practice may also result in a preference for themes that might support the research question, leading the researcher to miss other relevant themes (Conrad, 1987). These factors of interpretation mean that, unlike in quantitative research, each analysis will have a unique 'flavour' (Larkin et al. 2009). Indeed, in recent decades there has been an increasing recognition that complete objectivity in research may never be possible (Lincoln and Guba, 2000, p.208).

Despite widespread acknowledgement of 'the inherent subjectivity of the research endeavour' (Cassell and Symon, 1994, p.4), Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) note that there is still a lack of understanding by both students and supervisors that IPA is primarily an interpretive approach. This misconception, accompanied by a lack of confidence in raising the level of interpretation in analyses, results in broadly descriptive IPA that lacks depth and therefore demonstrates little difference to a standard thematic analysis. They agree with Smith (2011) that this does not represent good IPA.

In failing to understand the 'interpretive' nature of IPA, authors are also criticised for insufficiently stating the theoretical preconceptions they bring to the data or their own role in interpretation. This is a vital facet of IPA and one which ensures its accessibility and clarity. Greater reflection on the different levels of interpretation (e.g. individual comparison and social comparison) is advantageous as this would make an assessment of validity easier for the reader, particularly as these levels may be of differing importance to academic readers and practitioners (Smith, 2004). As this is the case, deep reflection is an important aspect of the current study. The fact that IPA is a flexible and inductive approach is, of course, one of its many advantages for this study (Reid et al., 2005).

## 5. Evaluative Criteria

The assessment of quality and validity in qualitative research has been an area of academic contention. Some researchers reject the framework for validity that is used within the quantitative social sciences. This framework generally assesses internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity, with the assumption that the researcher is able to objectively measure phenomena external to their involvement. Many qualitative researchers, on the other hand, assert that although validity and quality are important concerns in qualitative research, evaluative criteria must be appropriate to their differing epistemological position (Larkin et al. 2009).

A number of guidelines for measuring qualitative research have recently been produced (Elliott *et al.* 1999; Yardley, 2000). For example, Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These were offered as analogous to the more traditional quantitatively-oriented criteria. However, there has been considerable debate among methodologists about the value and legitimacy of these alternative standards for judging the soundness of qualitative research. Many researchers have also adopted what they consider to be more appropriate terms, such as, quality, rigor and trustworthiness (Davies and Dodd, 2002; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Seale, 1999; Stenbacka, 2001). For example, Davies and Dodd (2002) argue that applications of rigor in qualitative research should differ from those in quantitative research:

*‘By accepting that there is a quantitative bias in the concept of rigor, we now move on to develop our re-conception of rigor by exploring subjectivity, reflexivity, and the social interaction of interviewing’ (p. 281).*

Lincoln and Guba (1985) also argue that in qualitative research, the idea of discovering truth through measures of reliability and validity is replaced by the idea of trustworthiness, which is ‘defensible’ (Johnson 1997, p. 282), and by establishing confidence in the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

In order to avoid the over-simplification of evaluative check lists in IPA research, there is a requirement both for general criteria that evaluate all qualitative research, as well as more specific criteria that assess the more subtle features of IPA (Smith, 2011). For this reason, two sets of criteria, one general and one specific, are presented as a way to assess the quality of this research study. The first is Lucy Yardley’s (2000) four general principles for assessing the quality of qualitative research. This was selected because it has a

sophisticated and pluralistic stance; and it offers a variety of ways of establishing quality. Her four criteria are:

*1. Sensitivity to context*

The researcher may show sensitivity to the socio-cultural context of study, as well as to the existing literature, which is finally discussed in dialogue with the findings. Sensitivity to context is also demonstrated by appreciating the interactional nature of the interview; demonstrating skill, empathy, and responsiveness. Good qualitative research will show sensitivity to the raw material obtained from participants by including considerable verbatim extracts. Finally, sensitivity to the participants' meaning-making experience is demonstrated in the writing, making the study compelling and convincing.

*2. Commitment to rigour*

Commitment should be shown to the participant during data collection, building rapport and being attentive both to their needs and to their words. Rigour refers to the thoroughness of the study. This includes selecting an appropriate sample for the research question, conducting high-quality interviews and providing a complete analysis. The analysis must include sufficient idiographic engagement by using quotes from a number of participants to support each theme, as well as being interpretive rather than simply descriptive. It should be possible to deconstruct the account, both for shared themes and for distinctive voices and variations on those themes.

*3. Transparency and coherence*

The research process should clearly be described. Transparency may be enhanced by describing how participants were selected, how interviews were conducted and what steps were taken during data analysis. The coherence of the argument is judged by the reader based on whether it is made logically and whether or not contradictions are explained properly. The research should also be consistent with the theoretical assumptions of the method, in this case the phenomenological and hermeneutic focus of IPA.

*4. Impact and importance*

The research must tell the reader something interesting, important or useful.

These criteria provide some general guidelines for assessing the quality and validity of qualitative research. While they may be usefully applied to the evaluation of this study, Smith (2011) found that a more specific framework is needed to assess the quality of IPA



studies in particular. For this reason, his criteria for evaluating IPA research were also used in this study and are included below:

### **Acceptable**

For the study to be considered acceptable it must meet the following four criteria:

- It subscribes to the principles of IPA: it is focussed on phenomenological experience, interpretively engages in the hermeneutic circle and provides idiographic details.
- It is sufficiently transparent so the reader can see what was done.
- It is a coherent, plausible and interesting analysis.
- Sufficient sampling is taken from the data: Extracts are selected to indicate convergence and divergence, showing the density of each theme. For larger sample sizes, researchers should give illustrations from at least three or four participants per theme and also provide some indication of the prevalence of a theme.

### **Good**

For the study to be considered good, it must clearly meet all the criteria for being acceptable, as well as offering the following:

- It is well focused, offering an in-depth analysis of a specific topic
- Data and interpretation are strong
- The reader is engaged and finds it particularly enlightening.

These two sets of criteria were used throughout the research process to maintain the accuracy of the method and validity of the findings. Upon completion of the study, they also aided in a reflection on the overall strengths and weakness of the research methods. Chapter Six discusses these methods in detail, but for the purposes of this section, the following table demonstrates how Yardley's (2000) four main evaluative criteria were met in this study:

*Table Two: Implementing the Evaluative Criteria*

<b>Evaluative Criteria</b>	<b>Implementation</b>
<i>Sensitivity to context</i>	Socio-cultural context was addressed in Research Question Two and is the subject of Chapter Twelve. Sensitivity was conducted towards the groups by researching the setting and being unobtrusive in both actions and dress. Immersion in the field was fully recorded in a field diary. Sensitivity to the interview context was ensured through preparation using pilot studies, skills training and an interview schedule. Attention to the interactive process is discussed in Chapter Six. A commitment to the participants' voice and experience was also retained in the final write-up, which relies heavily on verbatim extracts.

<i>Commitment to rigour</i>	The initiatives were chosen and a sampling strategy developed using explicit criteria. To ensure high-quality interviews care was taken to build rapport and remain responsive to interviewees' verbal and non-verbal cues. The interview and analytical process adheres to the principles of IPA, providing a final narrative that is both descriptive and in places highly interpretive. It draws on particular cases to exemplify both shared and distinctive roles within the three groups, discussing both commonality and individuality. Links between themes are addressed in Chapter Nine and a comparison of organisational and contextual factors is included in Chapters Ten and Eleven.
<i>Transparency and coherence</i>	The research process is clearly described in Chapter Six, where decisions made in the sampling strategy and data collection are explained. A consideration of research ethics and a reflection on researcher positionality adds to the transparency of the study. A coherent narrative is held together through links to theories that reflect the experiences of group members. Themes are laid out in a logical and sequential way, gradually taking the reader from the personal to the contextual, and finally to the group perspective. In accordance with the idiographic focus of IPA, differences between cases are discussed in relation to the whole interpretation.
<i>Impact and importance</i>	Impact and importance are addressed in Chapter Twelve where the research implications are discussed at length. The multi-level approach taken in this study aims to enhance the impact of the study, particularly as Research Question Two addresses concerns raised by group representatives. Finally, the cross cultural sample further extends the theoretical transferability of the findings to the United States.

This reflection suggests that, although different criteria could be used in evaluating this study, based on Yardley's and Smith's, it has successfully met the standards of quality in qualitative IPA research. A second part in the evaluation is concerned with how the findings relate to existing socio-psychological and socio-economic literature. Areas in which they both support and diverge from existing knowledge are addressed in Chapter Twelve, along with an evaluation of the strengths and limitations of the methods in light of these findings.

## **6. Ethical Considerations**

Because qualitative research involves interactions with individuals, the careful consideration of ethical issues is important throughout, particularly in light of the need for transparency and rigour in both Yardley's (2000) and Smith's (2011) criteria for evaluation.

This section therefore discusses the ethical standards adopted in this research and how they have been considered throughout the stages of data collection, analysis and dissemination.

Firstly, in writing the research proposal in 2011, the following statement was made on ethical considerations. This was based on the ESRC's Research Ethics Framework (ESRC, 2015), which sets out ethical standards applicable to all ESRC funded research:

*'I will clarify my values and research aims in writing before engaging with participants. I will provide written information about the methodological approach including the purpose of the research (as a learning exercise for both participants and researcher). I will ensure that participants give their informed consent to voluntarily participate in my study, and confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured'.*

These considerations were elaborated upon in an application to the Department of Psychology Ethics Committee at the University of Bath, and approval was granted for the study on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2013. This confirmation, along with the submitted ethical form, is included in Appendices Two and Three.

In qualitative research, there are particular ethical concerns surrounding the researcher/participant relationship (Ramos, 1989). Having developed rapport and trust, interviewees may open up in very personal ways and so disengaging with participants following the research requires sensitivity. The disclosure of personal information during interviews also leads to the ethical challenge of what may be done with the information obtained so that it is not damaging to the individual or to others. This also relates to a third concern suggested by Ramos (1989), which is the researcher's subjective interpretation of the data. As this may conflict with participants' personal understanding, care must be taken to incorporate participant feedback into the research process. These concerns were addressed in this study.

First, a major ethical concern was to protect the anonymity of participants. Based on the principle that groups should enter the research process fully informed, each was provided with information about what to expect, along with a written consent form, which participants signed before the interview commenced (see Appendices Four and Five). This stated that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, that their data will be stored confidentially under the Data Protection Act (1998), and that they may request their contribution to be excluded or anonymised. The British Psychological Society suggests that all identifying data are removed prior to publication unless otherwise specified, and in social research, participants and locations are generally given pseudonyms in order to

conceal identities. However Grinyer (2002) notes that some researchers have questioned the assumption that participants always want to be anonymised. As grassroots organisations and practitioners working within them are generally concerned with publicising their work, it was decided, along with Grinyer's suggestion, to offer participants the choice of a pseudonym or their real name as well as the opportunity to look at material to be published beforehand. These options were also reiterated in a summary of the research findings sent following the writing up (see Appendix Nine). This protocol ensured that participants were given the maximum choice with regard to anonymity.

Ethical considerations are also particularly important in conducting Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis because, as the participant attempts to tell their personal story, the research scene becomes a 'site of ethical intersubjectivity' (Murray and Holmes, 2014). This is particularly true in IPA where participants' attempts at reliving personal experiences in detail must be met with great empathy by the researcher. For this reason, Husserl (1989, p. 170-180) characterizes intersubjectivity as 'einfühlung' or empathy, and Heidegger (1962, p.153-163) writes of an ontological 'mit-sein' or 'being-with' others. Sensitivity to the interview context, as well as being required in Yardley's (2000) evaluative criteria, is therefore also an ethical imperative. Respect for the participant during IPA interviews rests on the understanding that:

*'Phenomenology hopes to grasp the act, the event, of a subject who strives to bring order and meaning to experiences that are sometimes not easily comprehended or digested' (Murray and Holmes, 2014 p.24).*

Particular care was also taken at the end of the research study in encouraging participants to comment on both their interview experience and whether the findings were in line with their personal experiences. This was important in order to evaluate the quality of the interpretations, inform participants about the dissemination of the research at conferences, and finally to provide closure and thank them for their time. In order to maximise the practical impact of the study, an individual report of findings for Research Question One and Two was also sent to a representative of each organisation. Participants responded positively to this summary, and importantly, no objections or further suggestions were made to any of the findings, suggesting that the interpretations presented were accurate representations of participants' experiences.

## 7. Reflectivity and Researcher Positionality

As noted in Chapter Three, the need for pragmatic high-impact research makes sustainability a particularly value laden area of study. My role as a social scientist therefore requires professional research expertise and the aim of producing sound empirical evidence. As per the requirements of IPA research, this demands a high level of reflective practice, and for detailed reflections to be recorded in a research diary from start to finish. These reflections will be drawn upon in the following chapter, which explains the research methods in detail. However, the main points regarding the process of reflectivity and my position as the primary researcher are addressed in this section. Reflection is defined as:

*'The critical link between the concrete experience, the interpretation and taking new action. It is the key to learning as it enables you to develop an ability to uncover and make explicit to yourself what you have planned, discovered and achieved in practice.'* (Coghlan and Brannick, 2001, p. 31)

In my research diary, I reflected on each interview and group observation in a methodological way to ensure that any taken for granted assumptions were recorded and did not influence the data analysis. This reflective process involved reviewing each interview during the analysis phase and asking the following questions:

1. Am I jumping to conclusions?
2. What assumptions am I making?
3. Are my assumptions justifiable?
4. How should my perceptions change?

A research diary was kept throughout the research process, from the 14 January 2014 until the 20<sup>th</sup> November 2014. Entries were written in the first person, in a style that is more personal and subjective than academic writing. The entries focussed on my thoughts, feelings and assumptions and also provided a detailed record of my experiences which I was able to return to in order to validate and evaluate my findings.

This reflective process made use of Christopher Argyris' (1990) Ladder of Inference, which is shown below:

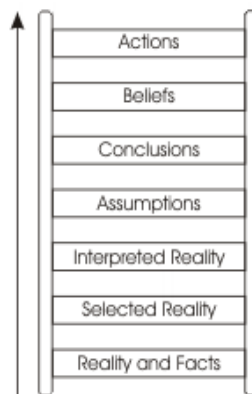


Figure Nine. Christopher Argyris' Ladder of Inference

This guide avoids the recursive loop in which data is selected to confirm existing beliefs while data that does not confirm these beliefs is ignored. In group observations, a recursive loop might occur through actions to seek observable data based on what has already been observed, resulting in an approach that is biased in favour of what has been seen previously.

By following either of these recursive loops, a researcher's assumptions are confirmed and existing beliefs reinforced. However, challenging assumptions and conclusions through questioning them and seeking contrary data challenged my habitual ways of thinking and prevented me from jumping to conclusions or making inaccurate judgments. As Schon (1991) states of the act of reflective thinking in research:

*'The practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomenon before him, and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his behaviour'. (p. 68)*

The practice of recording personal reflections in a research diary allowed my prior assumptions to be questioned. For example, my changing perception of 'sensory participation in nature' as a result of my fieldwork in America, helped to expose and 'bracket out' the evidence of such participation at Lammas in contrast to my own changing experience and to members of the other organisations (Nieswiadomy, 1993). These reflections brought to light the role of culture, social context and proximity to nature as influencing pro-environmental behaviours and values. The act of recording and separating out my personal assumptions and changing pre-constructions formed an important part of the learning experience that occurred as a result of this research study.

As discussed in section 4.1 my task was to focus on the new object of study rather than on preconceptions, in order for my positionality to become clear to me. For example, my position with regard to environmental sustainability became clear through my fieldwork in America, and a more nuanced position at the end of my data collection resulted in a balanced and critical interpretation of group members' experiences. As noted by Gadamer (1990) the phenomenon under study influences the interpretation, which results in new conceptions that again influence the interpretation. This interpretive journey was acknowledged in a diary entry upon returning to the United Kingdom. This entry also outlines the reflective process that I embarked upon when faced with results that did not justify my initial analysis, drawing on Christopher Argyris' (1990) Ladder of Inference and the questions outlined above:

11/06/2014

*Beginning my section on 'sensory participation in nature' has led me to reflect on my own experience of nature in the preceding months. I feel a 'loss of innocence' through my experiences and what I have seen of the city deprivation in America. It is impossible to go back, but at the same time I think it is necessary and beneficial to write from a wiser position of experience.*

*While writing up my results I have decided to remove the 'authentic expression' subsection from the 'personal agency section'. I found that this was not highly evident in the data, but reflected a theme that I thought would have an influence if it did turn out to be part of my results - it seems to include an expression of the alternative culture of members. Maybe I was just interested in the creation of culture at the time, after coming back from America. I thought that perhaps 'expressing an authentic self' was a way that members create a cultural movement around it.*

These reflections point to the learning process that resulted from data collection. The themes that arose during interviews led me to reflect on my own experiences and how these may have influenced interpretations of the data. Reflecting on my exposure to a wide range of perspectives and ways of life during my fieldwork in America led me to write from what I considered to be a 'wiser position of experience'. As a result, my views during the writing-up phase of the research process were perhaps less 'green' than at the start, and instead more considerate of the multiple points of view that make up social reality. This more nuanced perspective influenced my interpretation of themes such as 'sensory participation in nature' as I was able to step back from the pro-environmental experiences of group members to report these from a balanced and critical point of view.

These reflections also point to the iterative process of data analysis and reflection that occurred, in which themes were sometimes revised and rearranged. The decision to include

‘authentic expression’ in Chapter Nine was based on reflections about participants’ discourse on the topic as well as my possible reasons for including it in the analysis, including my time in America, and how these could influence the weight given to each theme. Care was taken for the analysis to accurately reflect the weight of each theme as they were discussed during interviews, with ‘personal resilience’ being the most prevalent theme among interviewees.

Finally, this iterative process involved reflection on the interviews in light of the literature. In some cases, this process led me to question whether the information provided by participants was influenced by my chosen methodology, as demonstrated in the diary entry below:

18/06/2014

*The iterative process continues...In going back and doing a literature search on phenomenology and ecophenomenology, I wonder if my inclusion of ‘existential thinking’ only reflects the aim of phenomenological study to discern meaning in the world....therefore I asked questions that looked to find meaning in participants’ experiences, and therefore they responded by giving me existential insights...I must take care to look for evidence of spontaneous existential thinking.*

Reflections such as these helped to improve the analysis as they accounted for the intersubjective nature of the interviews, in which the questions asked and methods used form an inseparable part of the process. Reflecting on these helped to minimise their influence on the final interpretations by, for example, finding evidence of spontaneous existential thinking in participants’ discourses.

Another important aspect of the reflective process is to consider the personal events and experiences in my life that may influence the process of data collection and analysis. For example, my choice to study Psychology for my undergraduate degree, followed by a Masters and PhD in Environment, Energy and Resilience in the relatively green and prosperous city of Bath in UK inevitably impacts upon my phenomenological world and the knowledge that I bring to this study. Although this is true for every person in differing ways, these experiences were factors influencing the initiation of this research. My positionality has also been informed by the literature outlined in Chapter Three, by pilot studies, acquaintances with those working in the voluntary sector and alternative economic field. These experiences are recorded and accounted for throughout the process of conducting this research, allowing for the in-depth and yet fair and transparent reporting of both the successes and failures of each initiative.



Reflective analysis also involves taking into consideration my own status as a twenty eight year old British female, with a middle class upbringing and socio-economic status as factors that could potentially impact the nature of the questions asked in this thesis, as well as the level of analysis presented. While this study aims to provide balanced interpretations, it does not aim for complete objectivity, in line with the increasing recognition that this is not possible in qualitative research (Lincoln and Guba, 2000, p.208). Instead, it is important to recognise that IPA is an *interpretive approach* (Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez, 2011). Analyses should therefore aim to go beyond simple descriptions to make inferences about the thoughts, feelings and motivations of group members. In understanding the interpretive nature of this IPA study, the current section therefore outlines the theoretical preconceptions that have been brought to the data by my personal experiences and acknowledges my own role in the interpretation. Discussing the ways in which this study aims to provide a fair, balanced, and convincing account ensures the clarity and accessibility of the findings.

## **8. Chapter Summary**

The current chapter identified this research as an inductive study of motivations and experiences, collective community-based approaches and practical alternative economic solutions. Based on these objectives, a qualitative research method was selected, and Interpretive Phenomenological analysis (IPA) was determined as an appropriate framework for exploring group members' personal experiences and group processes. The advantages of IPA to this study are that its focus on 'cognition' can potentially shed light on participants' meaning-making; that it guides the hermeneutic interpretation of texts; and that it is 'ideographic', retaining the particular claims of individuals within broad interpretations. The main challenge for this study is that it takes a multi-level approach, which demands both subjective and objective frames of reference. However, the use of multiple sources of evidence enhances the validity of the findings and the practical impact of the research; particularly as this study aims to have a local impact, rather than being empirically generalizable across populations. Evaluative criteria, which drew on both Yardley and Smith, were also made explicit along with reflections on how these were considered throughout the research process. Finally, important statements on the ethical protocol and researcher positionality were included in this chapter, in keeping with the need for transparency and deep reflection in IPA research. The next chapter will describe the process of conducting IPA in answering the research questions.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Conducting Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis**

#### **1. Introduction**

The previous chapter outlined the research design for this study and introduced Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis as the method of inquiry. This method was used to answer two research questions, which are:

1. How do members understand their experience within the selected groups?
2. What processes lead to the formation, maintenance and contraction of these groups?

This chapter describes each stage of the research process in detail, looking at how IPA was applied in choosing the most appropriate methods, in conducting the interviews and group observations, and finally in analysing the data. Importantly, these tasks were not conducted chronologically but rather proceeded in an on-going, iterative manner. This is because the process of theoretical transferability, which attempts to link findings from particular cases to theoretical models and concepts, involves going back and forth between the data and literature (Schwandt, 2007). To conduct a hermeneutic analysis for Research Question Two also requires themes to be revised until they account for each of the cases; and this engagement with the hermeneutic circle is an iterative process (Larkin *et al.* 2009).

However, in order to provide better clarity, the stages of data collection and analysis are presented in this chapter according to the different tasks undertaken, and in roughly chronological order. First, Section two describes the pilot study that informed some of the decisions that were made. Section three outlines the sampling procedure, discussing the selection of the groups and the individual participants separately. Section four then moves on to describe the process of data collection. Section five describes the analysis and section six the writing and dissemination.

#### **2. Pilot Studies**

To determine which techniques were appropriate to answer the research questions, pilot studies were conducted with members of voluntary initiatives in Wiltshire. Sampson (2004) suggests that pilot studies are under-discussed and under-used in qualitative research, perhaps as a consequence of methodological allegiances and a tendency to link pilots with

more positivist approaches in social science. However, pilot studies were highly beneficial here in testing the multiple group design (Bryman, 2001), refining the interview schedule, and in practicing the skills needed to conduct interviews well, observe group meetings in an unobtrusive way and analyse qualitative data effectively. This avoided potential problems in the final study and resulted in valuable lessons being learnt.

Firstly, the pilot studies helped to inform the choice of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis as the research method. These studies simply aimed to find common discursive understandings of ecological citizenship across a range of voluntary groups, and were therefore conducted according to the theory and method of discursive psychology (Edwards and Potter, 1992; Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Two major themes were identified across the sample of eight organisations. These were: 'Reciprocity and Anti-Consumer Ethos' and 'Collective reconnection'. However, the focus on language rather than on meaning, meant that these analyses failed to provide an idiographic account uncovering the deeper motivations behind individual members' involvement.

This analysis was nevertheless useful in focussing the ongoing literature review on the topics of 'reciprocity' and 'money', which were particularly important themes among the groups studied. The popularity of Salisbury LETS at the Wiltshire Voluntary Sector networking event also suggested that there is a potential role for community-economic initiatives in alleviating the economic burden of voluntary organisations. This prompted an extended exploration of the literature in this area and the selection of community-economic initiatives for the final study. IPA was then selected in order to conduct a more in-depth investigation of reciprocal practices within community-economic initiatives, and to investigate, in a more interpretive way, the meaning of group experiences.

The final lesson learnt from the pilot studies was in sampling. Groups were selected for the pilots to represent a broad range of voluntary sector activity. Opportunity sampling of interviewees also aimed for the maximum amount of data to be collected for each case study (Bryman, 2001). Interviews were conducted with volunteers, group members and community members in order to achieve the greatest possible range of perspectives. This approach was based on the discursive notion that a more complete picture of social phenomena is constructed by aggregating multiple perspectives of an event or situation (Burr, 1995). However, this diversity of groups and perspectives resulted in a more shallow and descriptive analysis that failed to capture some of the nuances within individual cases. Consequently, only three groups were purposively selected for the final study, and the

sampling strategy aimed for a more homogenous sample in order to provide meaningful analyses that comply with IPA standards.

### **3. Sampling**

After Ethical Approval was granted for this study on the 9<sup>th</sup> December 2013 (see Appendix Three), the next step was to design a sampling strategy. As noted previously, random sampling is not conducted in IPA research as it does not aim to be representative of the general population. Samples in IPA research are rather 'purposively' selected in order to shed light on a particular experience. In this case the experience was of community-economic group membership and so the sampling procedure consisted of two stages. The first was selecting the groups and the second was to select interviewees once access to the groups had been granted.

#### **3.1 Selecting the Groups**

The first sampling procedure involved designing the criteria upon which to select initiatives for this study. Based on the literature and on the pilot studies conducted in 2013, the following criteria were established:

1. They must represent systemic solutions that are part of global movements
2. They must be grassroots initiatives organising for community level sustainability
3. They must holistically respond to economic, social and environmental challenges
4. They must incorporate reciprocal, non-monetary, peer-to-peer trade networks

As well as stemming from the literature outlined in Chapters Two and Three, the first criterion drew from lessons learned during the pilot. The initiatives sampled in the pilot studies were selected to achieve a representative cross section of voluntary group activity in Wiltshire: these eight groups conducted a range of different activities, were different sizes and represented both urban and rural locations. However, although each group fulfilled a particular niche within the Voluntary Sector, the potential of these stand-alone charities to affect more widespread social change was found to be limited to a particular geographical area and interest group. The organisational structures and processes of each group fulfilled their unique purposes but did not represent alternative community or economic models for social change that addressed the underlying causes of unsustainability or could be scaled up to have global reach.

The decision to investigate global systemic solutions for sustainability also stems from literature reviewed early in the research process (Martinsson and Lundqvist, 2010;

Blomquist and Whitehead 1998, Carlsson and Johansson-Stenman 2000, Zelesny et al. 2000, Jagers 2009). These studies pointed to the unsustainable and negative psychological effects of macro-economic processes, and suggested the need to investigate new 'social experiments' rather than organisations that perpetuate current socio-economic practices. Models that have been replicated across national borders were also seen to have greater potential as a topic for research, both in determining cross-cultural factors influencing members' experiences and in having more far-reaching practical impacts.

The second criterion for selection is based on the understanding, introduced in Chapter One, that the emergence of localised solutions for sustainability follows the potential failure of global monetary reform policies and climate change frameworks. As such, this study investigates paths to developing sustainable and resilient livelihoods at a local level. The lack of financial investment in community-oriented Government initiatives such as the Big Society (Civil Exchange, 2015), further highlights the need to investigate alternative means by which communities can organise to meet their own needs.

This relates to the third and fourth criteria for group selection. As highlighted in the literature, factors influencing environmental behaviour cannot be considered in isolation and solutions must therefore provide holistic, collective and structural alternatives to unsustainable economic practices and ways of living. In this regard, the popularity of Salisbury LETS among organisations at the Wiltshire Voluntary Sector networking event further indicated that potential lies within community-economic initiatives that enable sustainable financing of voluntary activities. Based on these criteria, the Ecovillage Movement, the Timebanking Movement and the Local Exchange Trading Scheme (LETS) Movement were selected as the viable solutions to be studied. These models, introduced in Chapter Four, are a novel subject for research on environmental behaviour change and represent new ways of working together towards a sustainable world.

Three initiatives were chosen as this was considered to be a manageable size for a PhD study, in line with Larkin *et al*'s (2009) recommendation that a PhD project should be made up of 'three self-contained but related studies' each comprising between three and six cases (p.52).

The three initiatives chosen for this study also correspond to the formation, maintenance and contraction phases of development to be investigated in answer to Research Question Two. Lammas, being only four years into construction represents an organisation in its 'formation phase'. The Dane County Timebank, eleven years into development and with

plans to expand into the more integrated Mutual Aid Networks represents the 'maintenance phase' of development. As such, factors relating to the maintenance of its organisation structure, communication and governance processes since its conception in 2005 are explored. Finally, Bristol LETS represents the oldest of the three initiatives, dating back to the 1990's when paper notes were used before the online platform was introduced in 2007. Given that LETS has seen reductions in activity and in the number of LETS groups since the 1990's, this group represents the 'contraction' phase of development. Factors relating to each of these phases are investigated with regard to the selected case studies in Chapter Ten.

As outlined in Chapter Three, literature in psychology also suggests that the 'group goal' may be an important factor in group participation (Cosmides and Tooby, 2004). Furthermore, Ostrom (1990) highlights the importance of a group boundary that reflects explicit commitment to a common goal and determines the agreed mechanisms for reward and punishment between members. Groups were therefore selected that pursue a combination of social, economic and environmental goals between them. Bristol LETS and the DCTB may be seen to pursue a combination of economic and social goals, with the DCTB being more strongly focussed on social service delivery. Lammas ecovillage on the other hand represents a more radical expression of sustainable living, driven by the environmental goal of 'zero-impact'. The difference between this holistic approach and the others also indicates how far, and in what ways Western society might approach sustainable development.

The sampling procedure for selecting the groups involved contacting LETS, Timebanking and Ecovillage initiatives in the United Kingdom and America, resulting in the selection of a cross-cultural sample. The only specification in terms of location was that the initiatives were in developed Western nations, where unsustainable socio-economic practices are widespread. Sampling was conducted in England and Wales due to cost-effectiveness, and groups in the United States were also contacted in order to contextualise the role of these grassroots initiatives more broadly across Western society. Although this study is not aiming to be representative of whole populations, the use of a cross-cultural group sample means that findings may have theoretical transferability, not only to similar initiatives in the UK but also to ones in the United States, thereby widening the practical application of the findings.

The main advantage of selecting groups in different locations is that cross-cultural differences may be observed and included in the analysis. Indeed, cultural and contextual factors are found to impact upon social practices (Barry and Paterson, 2003), and interview excerpts that point to areas of both convergence and divergence between the groups works to determine the 'density' of each theme. This is particularly true of themes relating to the experience of culture among the participants (Larkin *et al.* 2009). As indicated in Chapter Three, the acknowledgment of these factors is necessary in conducting a whole 'systems' approach that considers wider contexts and systems in a holistic and practical way; and this was considered to be within the scope of the study.

### **3.2. Selecting the Interviewees**

In selecting interviewees, the subject matter, that is, the organisation naturally defined the boundaries of the relevant sample. The aim was to select a fairly homogenous sample for whom the research question would be meaningful, but within this boundary a certain amount of diversity was deemed necessary. This is required in order to analyse patterns of convergence and divergence that arise between cases and thereby examine variability within the groups. Where the subject is more commonplace, controlling for demographic homogeneity is more important (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014). According to Larkin *et al.* (2009) the way homogeneity is defined depends on the study. Because the population is relatively small it was possible to be more selective about which factors were the most important to consider for homogeneity. Participants were therefore chosen based on the simple demographic factors of age, gender and duration of membership. These selection categories are based on those used in population segmentation, and on the literature in environmental education which points to the effect of age and gender on environmental experience and calls for a consideration of these factors (Gough, 1999; Chawla, 1998). Duration of membership was also considered to be an important factor as it was often mentioned by group members. The sample covers both recently-joined and long-standing members in order to cover a balanced distribution of perspectives: why individuals choose to join, why they decide to stay for many years, and how their perceptions change over time. A comparison of individual group members in terms of the demographic factors of age, gender and duration of membership did not form a major part of the inductive analyses of interview data presented in Chapters Seven to Nine, or the organisational analysis of group formation, maintenance and contraction presented in Chapters Ten and Eleven. However, these factors do inform some of the findings presented and are discussed

in Chapter Eight. The primary aim of this categorisation, however, is to ensure the homogeneity of the sample (Larkin *et al.* 2009).

Due to the iterative process of the research, sampling took place in several phases, interspersed with phases of data-collection and analysis. For the first phase of sampling, initial contact was made with a group representative. This was first done by telephone and followed up with an email explaining the aims and objectives of the research. Once consent had been given, the group representative acted as a port of call throughout the research study and provided access to other interviewees. First the group representative was interviewed, and then participants were selected based on their willingness to participate. Finally, requests were made to the group representatives for members that met specific demographic criteria based on age, gender and duration of membership, in order to finish with a balanced sample. This 'snowball' method was the most practical method of sampling and very few obstacles to access were encountered throughout the study (O'Leary, 2005).

The snowball sampling strategy, by which contacts are referred by other participants, is cited by Larkin *et al* (2009) as being the most frequently used method in IPA. It was adopted in this study because the specific nature of studying groups rather than single individuals meant that consulting a single 'gatekeeper' was the most appropriate and least intrusive method of gaining access to the group. A potential limitation of this method, however, is that the more links a person has within the community, the more likely they are to be suggested as an interviewee (Heckathorn, 1997). In the first phase, the most socially connected members would have been interviewed, and this may have resulted in a sample that reflects more of a 'sociable' personality type. In the later stages of sampling, other methods were used such as looking at membership lists for recently joined members and through purposively selecting individuals to meet certain criteria. These methods drew more reluctant participants and worked to balance the sample.

A second consideration with the snowball sampling strategy is that in each case the group 'leader' was interviewed. This could also have implications for the final analysis, as noted previously, in that group leaders were found to have different experiences and perspectives to group members. However, these charismatic individuals provided in-depth knowledge and a crucial perspective on the group and so their inclusion in the sample was considered to be an advantage as it allowed a fuller picture of the group dynamic to be captured.



A different approach to sampling would have been to collaboratively determine the sample from the beginning, based on a series of *a priori* categories. This method was adopted in the first pilot study, however, and led to difficulties, particularly in selecting a sample collaboratively. This method led to the largest and most established groups being selected by Wiltshire Council members, rather than selecting a representative sample. Such an approach was therefore not considered to be the most appropriate. A second alternative would have been to define the sample more narrowly; for example, including only group leaders, new members or young members. However, this would have reduced the diversity of interviewees, along with the experiences and practices that could be explored. After consideration, it was determined that such *a priori* exclusions would unnecessarily limit the scope and utility of the findings.

Table Three provides details of all fifteen participants interviewed. Where participants have requested, pseudonyms have been used (see page 106 for Ethical Considerations).

*Table Three: Participant information*

Group	Name/ Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Duration of membership
Bristol LETS	Hilary	Female	45-50	7 years
	Karaline	Female	55-60	10 years
	Annette	Female	50-55	10 years
	Mike	Male	60-70	3 years
	Dave	Male	55-60	2 years
Lammas	Tao	Male	40-45	5 years
	Leanne	Female	35-40	4 years
	Kit	Male	35-40	5 years
	Dan	Male	30-35	Affiliated
	Dave	Male	55-60	Affiliated
DCTB	Stephanie	Female	40-45	11 years
	Joe	Male	60-65	2 years
	Katie	Female	25-30	1 year 9 months
	Irene	Female	25-30	7 years
	Natalie	Female	30-35	2 weeks

First, this table shows a nearly even gender distribution of eight females and seven males. In line with the requirements for IPA this sample is also fairly homogenous in terms of age, with most interviewees in middle-age brackets. However, Bristol LETS was found to attract an older demographic than Lammas and the DCTB. Consequently ages ranged from 45-70 years in Bristol LETS, while in the DCTB they ranged more broadly from 25-65 years and in

Lammas from 30-60. A sample of both recently-joined and long-standing members was selected in all three cases, ensuring that interviewees are likely to provide insight into group participation over both short and long periods. Because all Lammas residents have only been on site for 4-5 years, interviewees included those heavily affiliated but not necessarily long term residents. For example, Dave is a neighbour and 'semi' resident, while Dan has often volunteered at Lammas and is planning his eco-house. A comparison of group members' motivations and experiences in terms of their differing durations of membership is presented in Chapter Eight.

Although the sample is not aiming to be representative of the Western population in general, it does aim to provide a fair distribution of perspectives within the organisations studied, in order that the findings may be relevant to the groups in question as well as to similar initiatives in the developed West. This is necessary in order to maximise theoretical transferability and fully answer the Research Questions. A compromise was therefore made between finding a completely homogenous sample and finding a sample that represents some of the divergence within the groups. Therefore, although the sample is homogenous in terms of age and gender, some divergence aimed to reveal the differences in experience that add richness to the findings of IPA.

Personally sensitive categories such as religion, income and sexuality were deemed to be overly intrusive for the purposes of this research. These more complex lifestyle categories were not analysed at length in this study, given the large number of differences found between individuals in prior research (Barr, 2011). Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) also warn against dividing the sample and making comparisons based on demographic factors as this tends to make IPA studies overly complex, reducing their interpretive power.

However, it is important in IPA to consider and include details of participants' personal situations in order to build a comprehensive picture of their 'lifeworlds' and aid interpretation of the data. Demographic data regarding participants' educational attainment, occupation, ethnicity and marital status was therefore collected in order to aid interpretation of the findings, especially given that socio-economic status was highlighted in the literature as an important cross-cutting factor (Huddart-Kennedy, 2015). These demographic details are shown in Table Four below:

*Table Four: Additional demographic details of participants*

<b>Group</b>	<b>Name/ Pseudonym</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Educational attainment</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>
Bristol LETS	Hilary	Married	Advanced Diploma in Clinical Hypnotherapy, NLP and Life Coaching	Hypnotherapist and Life Coach	White, British
	Karaline	Single	BSc in Information Technology	Retired IT consultant	White, British
	Annette	Divorced	BA Hons in Drama and English Lit, Diploma in Clinical Hypnotherapy	Hypnotherapist, Aroma-therapist	White, British
	Mike	-	BSc in Information Technology	Retired IT professional, now volunteer coordinator	White, British
	Dave	Divorced	PhD	Retired teacher, private tutoring in Languages	White, British
Lammas	Tao	Married	Degree in Architecture	Director of Lammas	White, British
	Leanne	Single	A Levels	BBC Radio Scotland, voluntary sector, smallholder	White, British
	Kit	Married	BSc Degree	Architect, smallholder	White, British
	Dan	Married	BSc Degree	Carpenter	White, British
	Dave	Married	-	Retired	White, British
DCTB	Stephanie	Single	BSc Degree in Media studies	Director of the DCTB and Mutual Aid Networks	White, American
	Joe		-	Retired	White, American
	Katie	Single	BSc Degree in Psychology	Support worker	White, American
	Irene	Single	PG degree in History of Science and Medicine	Graduate student and organiser at LGBT Books for Prisoners	White, American
	Natalie	Single	PhD in Early Modern History	Doctoral Student	White, American

In terms of family life, ten interviewees are single or separated and five are married. The majority of those who are married (four) are Lammas residents, perhaps reflecting the difficulty of settling in an ecovillage without a marriage partner. The large number of single individuals in the other groups may also reflect the nature of the organisations themselves as they provide social inclusion to more vulnerable and isolated members of society.

Occupational and educational attainment data demonstrate that the majority of interviewees have undertaken further education. However, the majority are not engaged in full-time employment: five are retired, two are students and three are engaged in low-impact living as smallholders. The remaining five professionals work in health, IT, carpentry and social care and although income was not disclosed, it may be determined that participants tended to fall into a mid-range socio-economic group.

This study cannot therefore claim to be representative of other socio-economic brackets, but rather has theoretical transferability across socio-economic cultures typical of environmental movements in the West. Socio-economic status was found to influence the sustainability practices of Allied Drive residents in the DCTB as discussed in Chapter Seven, and the overall impact of socio-economic status on members' participation is highlighted in Chapter Twelve.

Notably, all of the interviewees are white British/American, and so the sample cannot aim to be representative of the Western population in general. Given this homogeneity, ethnic diversity between members is not a factor affecting the analysis. However, in aiming to offer a fair distribution of perspectives within the organisations studied, the Energy Project meeting in Allied Drive, an African American neighbourhood of Madison, is presented as a separate case study in section 2.3.1 of Chapter Seven. This predominantly African American and Latino neighbourhood was selected in order to more accurately represent the ethnic diversity within the DCTB and in the United States, adding richness to the IPA findings of this study.

## **4. Data Collection**

### **4.1 Interview Schedule**

An important part of this IPA research was to construct a good quality semi-structured interview schedule; this is included in Appendix Seven. Great care was taken to construct open-ended questions that would encourage the participants to talk at length about their experiences. Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) warn that overly long and detailed schedules are constraining to semi-structured IPA interviews and so it was important to be selective about the questions that would be asked. These were intended to guide the interviews without leading the participants or imposing certain assumptions on the participant's narrative (Smith et al., 2009). They were therefore quite open and vague, primarily using the prefix 'How?' and avoided making any assumptions about the

participants' experiences or concerns. The interview schedule was short, comprising eight questions, each with one or two prompts. These were intended to take up the majority of a 45-60 minute interview.

The first two questions asked participants to discuss their reasons for joining the group and to describe their most memorable experience. Recounting descriptive experiences in their personal history allowed participants to become comfortable talking about themselves. These questions took up a large part of the interview as they often led onto meaningful recollections that merited several prompts. The aim was to allow participants the freedom to exhaust a particular train of thought before moving on to the next question.

The second part of the schedule aimed to elicit more information about participants' lives by discussing their relationships within the group, within their local neighbourhood and their family life. Questions suitable for IPA tend to explore sensory perceptions, mental phenomena (thoughts, memories, associations) and individual interpretations, and so these were the focus of discussion. The interview questions were designed to indirectly glean information relating to participants' immediate sensory and psychological perceptions. Later questions invited them to be more analytical as they eased into the interview. These questions focussed on wider contexts and issues, how their views and feelings might have changed over time and what their future vision and ambitions might be. This order, beginning with descriptive questions and ending with wider reflections, was intended to build rapport and facilitate a comfortable interaction.

Five short questions at the end of the schedule moved away from participants' personal lives to ask more general questions about the groups. In order to answer Research Question Two, these questions focussed on the organisation and rules of the group, group dynamics and the groups' history. Members' personal experiences are important in analysing group structures and processes using IPA, and this primary data was compared to secondary data sources.

#### **4.2 Interview Preparation**

In order to conduct good IPA research and elicit meaningful data, it is essential to conduct high quality interviews. Smith (2011) therefore argues that researchers should be trained in qualitative methods and that their interview skills must be developed prior to conducting the research. For this reason, Smith, Flowers and Larkin's (2009) full-length book on IPA theory and method was used as a guide, alongside other papers and online sources including the IPA website ([www.ipa.bbk.ac.uk](http://www.ipa.bbk.ac.uk)). I also joined an online IPA Researchers

forum to gain helpful advice and support from others working on this methodology, and attended a three-day Mediation Training course in Bristol on 1st June 2014, which taught the various skills needed to practice empathetic listening. This training, along with the interviews conducted during the pilot studies and in previous research taught me how to build rapport, gain the trust of participants, practice active listening and ask open questions free from hidden assumptions.

In each phase of the data collection, participants were contacted and given information about the study. If they agreed to take part in the interview, a date and time was arranged over the phone. It is important that interviews are conducted in comfortable, familiar and quiet environments and so most were at participants' homes. Three interviews were in cafés following group meetings (Stephanie, Annette and Karaline), two were in quiet office spaces (Irene and Natalie) and two were outdoors at Lammas (Dave and Kit). The café interviews were the least comfortable due to noise levels and other distractions, however this did not have a negative impact on the interviews and all three were interesting and engaging despite some interruptions. The interviews conducted outdoors surprisingly also suffered greater noise and distraction, although all those at Lammas benefitted from being at the individual plots of residents. This allowed interviewees to look over their house and vegetable gardens for inspiration during the interview, which helped them to build a meaningful account. For example, looking through a window, Tao explained the meaning he associates with his plot:

*'You can just see poking out, you've got my polytunnel there, there's a hill there and there's a standing stone next to it, well that standing stone is the first thing I did on this plot and the hill, I call it Silbury hill it's a bit of a joke but it's a kind of place of focus for me. You can't quite make out but there's a large white crystal on the top of that hill, that's kind of in the centre of my hazel nuttery, my apple orchard and my damson orchard and (...) (exhale, smile) that's just on a micro scale I mean down the valley there near the woods there's an old cromlech where our ancestors, before the Romans came, is where they met with their ancestors, it's a real sacred place. We're really fortunate here in the Priscellis to be part of a whole wider sacred landscape pattern.'*

In this extract, visual prompts clearly aid Tao's discourse and meaning-making. Tours were also provided by Stephanie of various locations associated with the DCTB, which greatly helped to build a comprehensive picture of group experience. In an office surrounded by books and letters, Irene also described the work of her organisation, LGBT Books for Prisoners, which is a member of the DCTB by referring to the objects around her:

*'So you can see here are letters that we've responded to, here are letters that are ready to be matched to books and mailed and those are our letters that are yet to be processed and we try to send exactly what the prisoner requests.'*

Conducting the interview in their office environment helped Irene to draw on her volume of work to express their need for the DCTB as a community platform, and through participant observation allowed me to see this meaning first-hand. Similarly, the interviews conducted outdoors inspired participants' to discuss their relationships with the natural environment, for example Kit states that:

*'I'll be making cheese, we make soap, we're not vegetarians, we eat meat, I'm pointing at the rabbits over there, it's there for food, we tan the furs and use things, and the little pond that you can see has fish in it.'*

The location of interviews was therefore found in this study to have an impact on the meanings generated during the interaction. This is an important point to consider for future research, particularly in IPA, where meanings are created as participants engage in reflecting upon the experiences and feelings that are significant to them. Factors during the interview are here also acknowledged to influence the encounter, which shapes the emergent 'reality' of the findings (Larkin et al, 2009). Familiar locations or those that are meaningful to the interview topic are therefore optimal.

Before the interviews began, there was some discussion with each participant about the aims of the research study and what they could expect from the interview. These pre-interview conversations also provided an opportunity to ask group contacts about the type of challenges faced by the group and how they would like to benefit from this research study. The particular research interests specified by group representatives were:

- *Methods to enhance membership numbers in Bristol LETS*
- *Developing more sophisticated structures that help to encourage member participation in the DCTB without informalising or 'closing' the group*
- *A solution to the difficulties in social cohesion experienced at Lammas*

As noted in Chapter Three, these questions provided insight into the challenges faced by the groups and ensured that investigations for Research Question Two would remain inductive (Creswell, 2009).

It was also important to build rapport with interviewees before the interview commenced and so I took care to introduce myself and engage in friendly conversation. Participants' questions regarding the study were also answered before the interview started, and this helped them to feel at ease. Interviewees were then asked to sign a consent form and were

given an information sheet which they appreciated and found helpful. This was in accordance with the ethical procedures outlined in section seven of the previous chapter. A copy of the information sheet and consent forms for both interviewees and group representatives are included in Appendices Four, Five and Six.

The average length of the interviews were 60 minutes, although some were longer than others, depending on the personality of the individual, the rapport generated and how willing the participant was to talk at length about their experiences. Two interviews were shorter because, in one case, the interviewee was suffering from MS and so could not talk for a full hour, and in the other, circumstances meant that less than an hour of interview time was available. These interviews nevertheless lasted over half an hour each, and produced a reasonable amount of meaningful data. However, these experiences highlight the need to take extra care informing participants about what is expected of them from the interview and give them the opportunity to discuss any issues such as illness or a busy schedule. The selection of fifteen cases meant that despite this, an extremely large amount of data was collected. This amount was adequate for converging themes to clearly emerge between cases, and further analysis was only limited by the research timescale of two years. On reflection, the amount of data collected was more than enough for the level of in-depth interpretive analysis that is required for an IPA study of this scale.

### **4.3 IPA Interviewing**

Semi-structured one-to-one interviews have tended to be the preferred means of collecting data in IPA as they invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first person account of their experiences (Reid *et al.* 2005). Interviews are ideal as they allow participants the space to think, speak and be heard; although diaries, focus groups and participant observation are also used in IPA research. Although interviews are the main method used here, group observations were also conducted and these will be discussed in the next section. It is also common in IPA research to collect extra data in order to contextualise the interview material. As noted in Chapter Five, the use of group documents was particularly relevant in answering Research Question Two, and a research diary was kept throughout the process (Hollway and Jefferson, 2005).

The aim of the interviews was to elicit participants' stories, thoughts and feelings about the phenomenon of group membership. As noted previously, interviewing took place in phases, interspersed with transcription and analysis. This iterative process meant that initial analyses highlighted themes which could be picked up on in later interviews; however it



should be noted that the interview schedule was not changed during the interview process. The initial phase of data collection was from January-March 2014 and included one visit to Lammas ecovillage and interviews with members of Bristol LETS. In the second phase, all of the interviews at Dane County Timebank were conducted during April 2014, followed by another visit to Lammas and further interviews at Bristol LETS from May-June 2014.

In IPA it is necessary to audio record the interviews and produce verbatim transcriptions (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014). This is because participants' exact words are the subject of analysis, and tone of voice can also be useful in interpreting the data. An experienced IPA interviewer is sensitive to and tries to be aware of all these verbal, non-verbal, and non-behavioural cues in interpreting the meaning expressed in interviews (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014). As such, all interviews were recorded, non-verbal and behavioural communications were included in the transcripts, and other meaningful information was also recorded in a research diary soon after the interview. The Transcription Guidelines used in this study are included in Appendix Nine.

During the first phase of interviewing the interview schedule, taken to interviews in a note pad along with the dictaphone, was used in a flexible manner and often participants diverted quite extensively from the planned questions. Such diversions are acknowledged by Larkin et al. (2009) to be an important part of IPA research, resulting in rich analyses as unexpected themes are drawn upon. My role was to remain an active listener, avoiding the temptation to get drawn into the discussion, add my own points of view or analyse participants' comments during the interview (Flowers, 2008). This was achieved by adopting the 'interview persona' of a naive but curious listener trying to get to know the person in front of me. I found this to be particularly rewarding, and after conducting the first interviews my skills naturally developed. This learning experience is recorded in two early reflections:

*16/01/2014*

*The interview went really well and we covered a wide range of topics in great depth. Tao was more open about discussing his personal beliefs. I made a conscious effort to give both positive and negative prompts to avoid leading him. I was conscious of the need to start questions with HOW instead of DO YOU.*

*16/01/2014*

*Leanne's interview went well and we had a very good rapport. I was conscious of trying to understand and perhaps over-empathising in my attempt to understand things from her perspective. I have on-going concerns about whether my interview questions are gleaning the most possible information that I can. There is a combination of opinion-based and*

*experience-based questions, but interviewees' guarded nature makes the interviews quite rhetorical and so I will need to separate the rhetoric from the real experience.*

These thoughts indicate some of the initial concerns that were experienced during the interview process, along with efforts to maximise the quality of the interactions. According to Smith et al (2009),

*'Participants sometimes seem to prefer to give an account which is generic and impersonal...encouraging participants to tell you stories about what happened to them can be a good way of bring people back to the personal meaning of events.'* (p.69)

This guidance was used as the interviews progressed, as shown by a later diary entry:

11/03/2014

*If participants are reluctant to divulge details about their personal lives I am using various techniques to bring the interview back to how they EXPERIENCE life. I am remaining focussed on my goal to write a phenomenological account of community life both inside and outside community groups, and how experiences change over time.*

I became aware that, given the interview topic of 'group membership', it was tempting for some of the more shy interviewees to speak on behalf of the group at times. Prompting them with questions such as, 'how did you feel about that?' and 'what did that experience mean to you?' helped to focus the interview back to their phenomenological experience. Also asking participants to describe their most memorable experience within the group early in the interview helped to indicate that I was interested in their experience and gave them permission to talk about themselves. As the interviewer, I remained sensitive to the interviewee, monitoring how comfortable they were in discussing issues such as their family and social life. While I was careful to remain highly responsive to their verbal and non-verbal cues, I found in general that participants were extremely open and comfortable talking about their thoughts and personal experiences. A typical combination of personal experience and spontaneous rhetorical account is demonstrated in the following extract with a Lammas resident:

*C: So after living here for 4 years how are you feeling about the local area?*

*J: I'm beginning to (..) I miss Scotland a lot because I lived in Scotland 18 years, a long time, and I suppose I've been involved in organisations that were involved in national politics on an alternative level, so the Co-operative Movement or Reforesting Scotland or LGBT Network (..) and I do miss (..) that connection (..) feeling part of (..) a Scottish identity I suppose, so YEAH I got involved with the local community trying to set up a local shop in the village, and I did that deliberately because I didn't want to live in this bubble that was here, I wanted some connection with people outside, um, I'm slowly feeling more connected, I wouldn't say it's brilliant yet, its slow but I think that's alright*

*C: You set up a shop in the village?*

*J: We tried (..) yes we have got a shop running but we haven't managed to buy it*

*C: Mmm ok, and did you say you found it difficult to move from Scotland?*

*J: Yes especially when it's completely different framework or (..) political with a small p feeling about stuff, well it is for me, but, I suppose I'm interested in the organisation of power, so (haha)*

*C: So what is the power structure in Lammas...does everybody have a voice?*

*J: No, it's a bit like Little Britain, there's a parliament that you can be elected to and so some people are directors and some people aren't and to me that is an ABSOLUTE anathema, I cannot understand why we do not have equal representation but we don't, so.*

Here, Leanne spontaneously recalled her activist experiences in Scotland, the emotional meanings those held for her and how these related to her experience of comparative isolation at Lammas. Allowing participants to practise 'unconstrained recall', recounting personal events at their own pace, is found to promote accuracy (Chawla, 1998), and my aim was to facilitate this emotional recall with small prompts for elaboration. As Leanne spontaneously mentioned the 'organisation of power', it is clear that group politics is emotionally salient with regard to her experience at Lammas. Although these feelings were expressed in a rhetorical manner, in IPA, the interpretation of this text would go beyond her discourse about group politics to comment on her psychological experience of the power dynamics that she reports to exist at Lammas. This analysis is discussed in section five.

#### **4.4 Group Observations**

As well as one-to-one interviews, a small number of group observations were conducted with each group. These were not the main focus of the study but served to contextualise the interview data. This is an important element of IPA research as it is consistent with Heidegger's emphasis on the 'person-in-context' (Smith et al. 2009). Supplementing interview data with observation revealed the ways in which group members interact and communicate with one another, as well as revealing any distortions or inaccuracies in description provided by interviewees (Marshall and Rossmann, 1995).

Participant observation involved establishing rapport and blending into the group meetings, encouraging members acted naturally. This aimed to avoid any behavioural changes as a result of being observed; called the 'Hawthorne effect' (Olson et al. 2004). Following the event or meeting, I then removed myself from the setting and immersed myself in the data in order to record and understand what happened (Bernard, 1994).

According to Gold's (1958) categorisation, my stance was an 'observer as participant', meaning that the group was aware of my observation activities and I could participate in group activities but my role was to collect data. As such, group members controlled the level of information given (Merriam, 1998). After gaining entry to the group settings, I then followed Taylor and Bogdan's (1984) tips for conducting observations. This involved becoming familiar with the setting beforehand, being unobtrusive in my dress and actions, keeping observations short, and being honest, but not too technical or detailed.

Observations were primarily of group meetings; this included the Wiltshire Exchange Scheme launch and a monthly Core Team meeting at Bristol LETS. At the Dane County Timebank, I attended a Transportation Builders Workshop, MAN development meeting, finance meeting, and Power Time meeting for the Allied Community Co-op. At Lammas I spent an extended period of time with one of the residents observing some of her daily chores and gaining an insight into ecovillage life. I also spent some time with a volunteer who was living and working at the ecovillage as well as with a resident of the nearest residential village, Gladwr. Participant observation was conducted before and after interviews, at which time I took note of my surroundings in order to gain contextual knowledge of participants' life-worlds. Observations during interviews also involved checking for the nonverbal expression of interviewees' feelings.

Part of the fieldwork was undertaken in the United States, and as such, extensive observation was conducted in order to record and account for differences in culture. During this trip I took time to draft frequent and extended notes about my group interactions and general observations. This note-taking was done using 'thick description,' as described by Geertz (1973). Although these descriptive and reflective pieces were not used in the analysis, they helped to avoid the risk of 'culture shock' and the potential for any cross-cultural perceptions influencing the interpretation of participants' experiences (Bernard, 1994). I found that in recording my observations as well as my personal thoughts and feelings, I was better able to bracket these out and conduct a more objective phenomenological analysis. The following excerpt is an example of a group observation for the Dane County Timebank in Madison:

*10/04/2014*

*We went to a Power Time meeting at the Allied Community Co-op which is located in an African American neighbourhood on the outskirts of Madison. The deprivation of the area struck me, the context in which this co-op exists is dramatically different to downtown Madison or anywhere in the UK; the level of conflict is much higher.*

*The co-op applied for a grant of \$40,000 and received only \$3000 for Power Time. There is neighbourhood discrimination as the city council neglects to fund projects in Allied, the community now does not have a grocery store or a school (the community run a Boys and Girls club) and unless residents travel 1hr on the bus, they can only eat at Mac Donald's or Subway on the highway intersection. There is very high unemployment and poverty, and during the cold winter many people accrued heating bills that they simply are unable to pay. On the 21 March those who haven't paid their bill get their heating switched off completely. The tone of the meeting was one of helping each other to survive- literally. The people in attendance were desperate to create a co-operative structure in the neighbourhood.*

As demonstrated here, observations of group meetings typically described elements of the physical environment, details about the participants and interactions that occurred in the meeting, as well as important information that emerged with regard to the group structures and processes. This process draws on Merriam's (1988) observation guide for field notes, and is deemed the most thorough by Wolcott (2001) who states that,

*'When one is not sure what to attend to, one should look to see what it is that one is attending to and try to determine how and why one's attention has been drawn as it has' (p.96).*

This process began with descriptive observations before a process of reflection leading to more focussed observations. Importantly, my position as a British researcher, as noted in Chapter Five, was also accounted for in the interpretive analysis.

## **5. Analysis**

As noted previously, data analysis was interspersed with phases of interviewing and participant observation. The following sections outline the process of analysing; this occurred roughly according to the 'steps of analysis' laid out by Smith et al (2009).

### **5.1 Transcribing and Note-taking**

All fifteen interviews were audio recorded. Each interviewee gave consent for the recording to be made and stored in a private file, in line with the ethical regulations on data protection (ESRC, 2015). Transcription is an important part of interpretive analysis as it is recommended that:

*'Researchers totally immerse themselves in the data or, in other words, try to step into the participants' shoes as far as possible' (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014 p.12).*

Listening to the audio recordings, sometimes several times, helped in recalling the atmosphere of the interview and the setting in which it was conducted. Vocal intonations gave clues as to the thoughts and feelings of participants, and this provides a host of

aspects which might be selected for transcription, meaning that in IPA, transcription is itself a form of interpretive activity (Smith et al. 2009).

However, according to Smith et al. (2009), a highly detailed transcription of prosodic aspects of interviews is not required in IPA as the analysis focuses on the meaning of what was said, that is, *the content*. In this study, interviews were recorded verbatim, utterances such as sighs, laughter and pertinent gestures were noted in parentheses, and pauses of different lengths were recorded with varying numbers of dots, for example, (..) (....). The action of listening, transcribing and re-reading generated new insights about individual cases, which were recorded. The most striking observations and powerful recollections of interviews were recorded in a separate notebook; which allowed them to be bracketed-out until a later stage in the analysis. In the initial note-taking, all of the transcripts were printed and scrutinised on hard copies.

Given IPA's idiographic commitment, each transcript was first scrutinised separately and in detail. This process began with comprehensive note-taking on the semantic content and language used in each section of text. The focus of this free textual analysis was on the participants' attempts to make sense of their experience of group membership, and my primary concern was to engage fully with the transcript, representing the explicit phenomenological objects, events and experiences in the participants' life-world (Smith et al. 2009). In subsequent readings I added linguistic comments, particularly noting distinctive phrases and emotional responses. Connections were also made between comments in each transcript based on reiterations and contradictions in the text. Finally, interpretive comments were added, drawing on my theoretical knowledge and emerging understanding of each case. This went beyond explicit statements to link the transcript together at a more abstract and interpretive level. Importantly, transcription and note-taking was conducted soon after the interviews.

## **5.2 Developing Emergent Themes**

This second stage involved several processes, as the analysis moved from the meanings in individual cases, to shared meanings, and back again as the themes developed. In this iterative, inductive cycle, analyses progressed from the purely descriptive, to an interpretive psychological account of group members' experience (Smith, 2007), and of group-level processes. According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014, p.11)

*'The researcher moves between the emic and etic perspectives. The latter is achieved by looking at the data through a psychological lens, interpreting it with the application of*

*psychological concepts and theories...showing the emic perspective protects researchers from psychological or psychiatric reductionism’.*

The first step in conducting the analysis was to answer Research Question One by organising themes relating to participants’ experiences of group membership. This was done first by breaking up the narrative flow of each interview to determine which conceptual statements were most important. Importantly, in keeping with IPA’s idiographic commitment, each interview transcript was scrutinised as a single case before moving onto the next. As similar themes began to emerge across the cases I was careful to bracket out any assumptions and consider each transcript on its own terms in order for new themes to naturally emerge.

Secondly, I compared the transcripts of each group in turn (five transcripts). Sub-themes were clustered together if they occupied a similar meaning and if that meaning served an important function in the phenomenological experience of interviewees. This ‘hermeneutic’ interpretation was influenced by my reading of the whole text and my experience of the interview. The overarching meaning became the super-ordinate theme title. For example, ‘Existential Thinking’ was formed of the sub-themes: non-material values, compassion, morality and fear of the future. This process of abstraction (Larkin *et al.*, 2009) revealed a total of eight super-ordinate themes across the three groups. During this process, any areas of special significance, convergence and divergence between individual cases were also recorded under each theme. The process of abstraction from sub-themes to major themes is demonstrated in Table Five below:

Table Five: Themes and sub-themes across the groups

<b>Groups</b>	<b>Super-ordinate theme</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>
Lammas, LETS and DCTB	Resilience	Autonomy, reciprocity, necessity, security, skills = personal empowerment, basic needs, emotional needs, personal survival, helplessness/inadequacy, apocalyptic, worried
Lammas, LETS and DCTB	Alternative culture	Independent from mainstream, anti-money, anti-job, pride: seen as better, happier, healthier, social work/care community, hippie area, selective media, activist connections
Lammas, LETS and DCTB	Authentic expression	Freedom, creativity, sharing, 'sing your song'
Lammas, LETS and DCTB	Existential thinking	Non-material values, compassion, morality and fear of the future
Lammas, LETS and DCTB	Friendship group, tribe	Emotional connection, inclusion, emotional need, identity within group, shared ideology, group dynamics- family, hierarchy, open/closed, platform, spin-off groups
Lammas, LETS and DCTB	Imposed community	Friction with business model, top-down, inorganic, friction, conflict
Lammas, LETS and DCTB	Social justice and empathy	Caring for disadvantaged, humble, motivator-passion, personal experience of injustice- 'redesigning work', 'I want to grow my own carrots,' 'the pornography in the media'
Lammas	Sensory participation in nature	Sensory reciprocity/experience, 'stepping into', 'listening, direct connection to the land- 'interwoven', flow-evolution of the self, spiralling upward, reverence of beauty, acceptance, humility

An important part of IPA research, especially in larger studies, is to measure the recurrence of themes across the cases (Larkin et al., 2009). In this study, emergent themes were classified as 'recurrent' when they were present in over 50% of cases; themes that were non-recurrent and of very minor significance were discarded at this stage of the research.



In each case, the prevalence of the themes was determined by the number of times its sub-themes were mentioned.

The following three tables show the prevalence of the eight major themes among interviewees in the three groups. It can be seen here that although 'Imposed community', 'Existential thinking' and 'Social justice and empathy' may score under 50% in one group, their high prevalence in the other groups means that they were considered recurrent. Similarly, although 'Sensory Participation in Nature' was not prevalent in Bristol LETS or the DCTB, its 100% prevalence among Lammas residents means that it was also included in the analysis.

*Table Six: Prevalence ratings of themes for Bristol LETS*

<b><i>Super-ordinate theme</i></b>	<b>Hilary</b>	<b>Karaline</b>	<b>Annette</b>	<b>Mike</b>	<b>Dave</b>	<b><i>Prevalence (%)</i></b>
Resilience	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	100
Alternative culture	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	80
Authentic expression	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	80
Existential thinking	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	100
Friendship group, tribe	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	100
Imposed community	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	60
Social justice and empathy	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	40
Sensory participation in nature	No	No	No	No	No	0

*Table Seven: Prevalence ratings of themes for Dane County Timebank*

<b><i>Super-ordinate theme</i></b>	<b>Stephanie</b>	<b>Joe</b>	<b>Katie</b>	<b>Irene</b>	<b>Natalie</b>	<b><i>Prevalence (%)</i></b>
Resilience	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	100
Alternative culture	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	80
Authentic expression	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	80
Existential thinking	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	40
Friendship group, tribe	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	100
Imposed community	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	80
Social justice and empathy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	100
Sensory participation in nature	No	No	No	No	No	0

*Table Eight: Prevalence ratings of themes for Lammas*

<b><i>Super-ordinate theme</i></b>	<b>Tao</b>	<b>Jane</b>	<b>Kit</b>	<b>Dan</b>	<b>Dave</b>	<b><i>Prevalence (%)</i></b>
Resilience	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	100
Alternative culture	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	100
Authentic expression	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	100
Existential thinking	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	80
Friendship group, tribe	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	100
Imposed community	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	40
Social justice and empathy	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	60
Sensory participation in nature	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	100

These tables provide a general indication of the prevalence of each theme, although a considerable amount of variation would naturally exist in the experience of each phenomenon. Capturing these points of convergence and divergence, commonality and individuality between the cases is addressed in the writing-up phase, and this is discussed in section six. For the purposes of this section, however, the prevalence indications shown above help to meet the criteria for evaluation outlined in the Chapter Five. Smith (2011) suggests that indications of prevalence are essential in studies with larger sample sizes, as they enhance the validity of the findings. These may be particularly helpful in Part Three of the thesis, where themes may not include extracts from every case.

### **5.3 Additional Data for Research Question Two**

Research Question Two asks:

*What processes lead to the formation, maintenance and contraction of these initiatives?*

This implies a change of perspective from the analysis of individual members' experiences, to a more contextual focus on the organisations and their wider social movements: a move from the 'individual-level' to the 'group-level'. This part of the analysis first drew on the accounts of group members as they described their experiences. From the more abstract themes outlined above, this involved going back to the individual cases in order to draw on experiences relating to the organisation and rules of the groups, group dynamics and group history. Because of the more sparse nature of these accounts relevant extracts were selected for more in-depth analysis. Primary data was compared to secondary data sources using IPA in order to evaluate the relative successes and failures of the groups.

The design of Research Question Two involves an analysis of each group in turn as these relate to the formation, maintenance and contraction phases of development. An analysis of convergences and divergences between these group processes is also conducted in order for learning to take place between the cases. This is followed by an appraisal of the wider social movements of which the initiatives are a part, as well as their contextual influences. Again, each group is analysed in turn, this time in terms of the broader processes of replication, scaling-up and translation of the initiatives (Seyfang and Longhurst, 2015). A comparative discussion of the contextual factors influencing all three groups finally aims to inform the direction of future organisational developments.

This broad contextual and organisational analysis appropriated a range of secondary data sources including notes from workshops and conferences on complementary currencies, data from online repositories, information from group websites, blogs, and other media. The range of sources was selected to provide a comprehensive overview of the respective groups, as well as the wider organisational contexts in which they function. As discussed in Section 4.4, participant observation also provided a wealth of additional group-level data, particularly from group meetings. In addition to the group events and meetings noted previously, Table Nine outlines the secondary data collected in answer to Research Question Two:

*Table Nine: Secondary data sources*

Initiative	Data source	Location	Quantitative/ Qualitative	Primary/ Secondary	Details
LETS, DCTB	Community Currency Knowledge Gateway	community- currency.info	Both	Secondary	Online repository of data on best practice for community currencies
LETS, DCTB	Guild of Independent Currencies Conference	Bristol, Watershed	Qualitative: analysis of presentations	Primary	Workshops and talks from global community currency innovators including Stephanie (Oct, 2014)
LETS, DCTB	Change that is Meaningful Conference	Cardiff, Millennium Centre	Both: panel discussion, workshop, materials	Primary/ Secondary	Conference hosted by Spice and CCIA (Nov 2014, Cardiff)
Lammas, LETS, DCTB	Bibliography of Community Currency Research	cc- literature.org	Both	Secondary	Database of publications in the field of community currencies
LETS, DCTB	Complementa ry Currency Resource Centre	Complementa ryCurrency.or g	Both	Secondary	Online repository of background info. for community currency practitioners

LETS	Wiltshire Exchange Scheme launch event	Trowbridge Town Hall	Qualitative: interviews	Primary	Interviewed Mike Lennard (Salisbury LETS) and Mary Fee (secretary of LETSLink UK) (24 March 2014)
LETS, DCTB	Forum for Community Currency Researchers	ccresearch.community-currency.info	Qualitative	Secondary	Comments from software designers on opensource software and current issues
DCTB	Time for the World	www.timeftw.org	Qualitative	Secondary	Blog containing news and info about the development of Mutual Aid Networks
DCTB	Dane County Timebank website	www.danecountytimebank.org	Both	Secondary	Information on membership wants and offers, group history
LETS	Bristol LETS Website and LETSLink UK	www.bristollets.org.uk, www.letslinkuk.net	Both	Secondary	Information on membership wants and offers, group history
Lammas	Lammas website	lammas.org.uk	Qualitative	Secondary	Links to planning documents, other research, and information on courses
Lammas	Living in the Future Series	livinginthefuture.org	Qualitative	Secondary	Documentary TV series produced by Lammas

The secondary data collected for this part of the study was based on the principle in IPA of 'complete immersion' in participants' life-worlds, or as Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014 p.12) state, 'trying to step into the participants' shoes as far as possible'. On an organisational and cultural level this meant joining the Forum for Community Currency Researchers, researching the materials on best practice for those setting up LETS and Timebank groups, and attending networking events, thereby immersing myself in the wider social movements. Taking extensive field notes on my experiences was important in understanding the social and cultural context surrounding the chosen initiatives, or in Heidegger's terms, the 'group-in-context'. Indeed, sensitivity to the socio-cultural context is the first of Yardley's (2000) four general principles for assessing the quality of qualitative research. Conferences, workshops and online resources that provided insight into the ecovillage and alternative currency movements were purposefully selected based on their appropriateness to the research question, and the sources, all of which were linked to key actors within the movements, were also cross-referenced to ensure the quality and accuracy of the data. Sensitivity to the literary context will be discussed in the following section, documenting the writing-up phase of the study (Yardley, 2000).

## 5.4 Writing and Dissemination

Writing-up is an important part of IPA analysis because, as Smith (2009) states, 'the reader performs a crucial role within the hermeneutic dialogue' (p.109). In good IPA writing, the reader who was not present during interviewing should also make sense of the participants' sense-making, and 'see through their eyes'. The objective in writing-up was to transform the super-ordinate themes outlined previously into a comprehensive, systematic and persuasive narrative account of participants' experiences, going back to the 'things themselves' (Husserl, in Smith et al 2009). This stage was also interpretive, as decisions were made in how to represent individual cases, both in relation to the whole sample and the whole literature-base. Writing-up was therefore an iterative, circular process, moving between existing theories, new interpretations and individual cases.

First, it was clear that the eight emergent themes fell into three broad categories: the 'personal', 'group' and 'cultural' spheres of experience. This distinction was found to naturally resonate with the suggestion made by Bandura (2001) in his Social Cognitive Theory (see page 29), that human activity may be categorised into three modes of agency: direct personal agency, proxy agency that relies on others, and collective agency exercised through coordinated effort. Group members equally described their motivations as being personal, relational and collective, and so this early theoretical link was made, thereby locating the findings within established literature and structuring the narrative presentation according to this common phenomenological distinction.

Second, in Chapter Eleven links are made to Seyfang and Longhurst's (2014) on-going investigation of grassroots innovations. Gill Seyfang is the foremost exponent of these models, having written extensive articles on Timebanks, LETS and ecovillages, her work is an important link in the literary context of this study. Her suggestion that innovative social models may be diffused in society through three routes: replication, scaling up and translation had significant resonance with my investigation of the chosen community-economic models as broad social movements (Seyfang, 2009). These processes, which also draw on Niche Management Theory, reveal the dynamic organisational processes and cultural factors influencing community-economic initiatives at the grassroots (Raven, 2012).

In the Chapters that follow, a strong commitment to the idiographic nature of IPA is retained throughout. Each theme is described using several interview extracts. This is important in presenting the emic perspective, that is, the voice of the participants' personal experience (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014). The inclusion of a large proportion of transcript

extracts also allows the reader to assess the pertinence of the interpretations that stem from them. Images are also included in some instances; these do not form part of the analysis but are included for descriptive purposes only. The majority of these are personal photos and where they are not personally taken, a source is provided below the image.

The interpretative commentary engages several levels of interpretation, from a descriptive to a highly detailed, theoretical level (Chapman *et al.*, 2007; Smith and Osborn, 2007). Developing new findings using IPA involved moving from the 'whole' to analyse particularly resonant passages. These interpretive analyses were only possible in light of the whole interpretation, and in this context, the deeper meaning of participants' words 'emerged'. The theoretical insights generated from this interpretive phenomenological analysis are intended to build upon the current socio-psychological and socio-economic approaches to sustainability outlined in Chapters Two and Three. Following the narrative account presented in Part Three of the thesis, the final discussion in Chapter Twelve relates these newly emerged themes to existing literature. Results were discussed with other researchers throughout, and effort was made to disseminate the findings at conferences and among interested parties in the ecovillage and alternative currency movement.

## **6. Chapter Summary**

This chapter has described the use of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis in answering the two research questions, explaining decisions made from the conception of this study to its conclusion. It showed how the pilot studies influenced the choice of community-economic initiatives as the topic of study. Three criteria for sampling the groups were discussed along with a sampling procedure that controlled for both homogeneity and diversity among interviewees. Data collection progressed around the hermeneutic circle from interviewing to analysing and writing up the findings. Importantly, this chapter provides transparency to the research process, allowing the reader to trace the interpretations presented in the next part of the thesis back to themes that emerged from participants' experience.

## **Part Three**

### **Results and Discussion**

This final part of the thesis presents its results and discusses their implications within the literature and with regard to practice and policy on sustainability. The following chapters are presented in such a way that they answer the research questions in turn. The exploration of Question One, the phenomenological analysis of group members' experiences, is divided across the first three chapters. These correspond to the 'personal', 'group' and 'cultural' spheres of experience, as reflected upon by participants. This distinction draws on Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1997), which suggests that in determining self-efficacy, an interdependence exists between the personal and the collective self. Chapters Ten and Eleven then answer Research Question Two, exploring group structures and processes followed by their wider cultural contexts. Chapter Twelve finally concludes this thesis with a discussion of the findings and their implications. It also develops the analysis and provides an evaluation of the research conducted.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **The Phenomenology of Group Experience: Personal Agency**

#### **1. Introduction**

This chapter introduces the results section of this thesis and aims to answer the first research question:

*1. How do members understand their experience within the selected groups?*

Data analysis provided an insight into the phenomenological experience of group membership, that is, what every-day group experiences mean to those who live and embody them. The psychological phenomena outlined in the following three chapters draw on interview excerpts across all three groups. These first-hand insights provide a platform for understanding the contribution of the selected social groups to the psychology of sustainable living.

Analysis of the data revealed that the answers to Research Question One are extremely complex, involving experiences relating to a variety of scales, from individual experience to the reproduction of culture. For this reason, the answers to Research Question One have been divided into three chapters, based on three broad themes that emerged from the data analysis: these are the 'personal', 'group' and 'cultural' spheres of experience. In line with this finding, Bandura (2001) distinguishes among three modes of agency: direct personal agency, proxy agency that relies on others, and collective agency exercised through coordinated effort.

This chapter focuses on group members' experiences in relation to 'personal agency'. The following three sections present the psychological phenomena within this 'personal' domain of experience. The phenomena identified in order of prevalence are 'resilience', 'existential thinking' and finally, 'sensory participation in nature', which was unique to the Lammas community. These are discussed in turn.

#### **2. Resilience**

'Resilience' was unanimously expressed by interviewees across all three organisations. This represents the clearest example of personal agency being exercised among group



members, leading to the experience of empowerment associated with the activities they undertake. Psychological resilience is defined as an individual's ability to adapt to stress and adversity as a result of family, health or financial problems, for example (APA, 2014). Rather than being a trait of the individual, it is a process of developing and practicing coping techniques (Rutter, 2008; Klohnen, 1996). These may be individual coping strategies, or may be supported by families, schools, communities, and social policies that make resilience more likely to occur (Leadbeater *et al.*, 2005). Through these factors, psychologically resilient people develop an optimistic attitude that allows them to effectively balance negative emotions with positive ones, enabling them to effectively manage crises (APA, 2014).

## 2.1 Bristol LETS

Within Bristol LETS, activities offering resilience include doing transactions with other members, maintaining the online network of members, planning and initiating a vegetable co-op, living in a morally upright way as well as giving and receiving social support through illness. The range of activities conducted by LETS members is shown in Figure Ten.

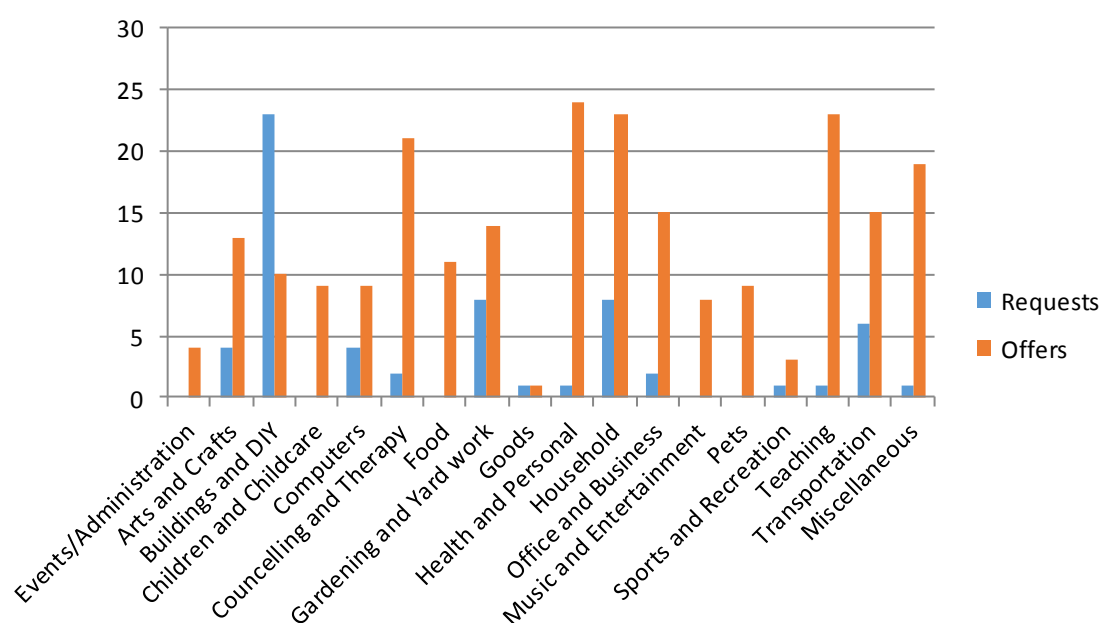


Figure Ten. Online 'requests' and 'offers' made by members of Bristol LETS

At the LETS core-team meeting, which was held in a bustling local café, Annette, a 47 year old part-time therapist told the story of how she recently was unable to thread a bobbin on her sewing machine. She had lost the manual and, after asking some friends, called upon

the assistance of a 'good fairy from LETS', who came over and helped her so that she could finish making her lodgers' curtains. She exclaimed that:

*'The curtains had been kind of stuck as an unfinished job for weeks and weeks and I just finished it and you do FEEL powerful, as opposed to powerless. It's just reassuring, it's so nice that somebody would WANT to do that, I mean ok I have done other things for people at LETS but it still feels quite nice to receive.'*

She emphasised the reciprocal nature of the transaction, saying that it is like a web that 'leads onto all sorts of other conversations.' For example, she described that during a transaction she advised a LETS member about housing, which also turned out to be very helpful for her: 'unexpected useful things.' Annette's opportunistic attitude demonstrates that she is aware of the possible benefits of reciprocal interaction and that she is pragmatically driven to reap such benefits in an effort to enhance her own personal resilience. The role of economic need in driving the desire for personal resilience is evident, as she states that:

*'I was in housing co-ops when I was young so I'm not completely new to it, yeah, we used to get housing association properties that were unfit to live in and didn't have a licence, and plumb them and wire them...it was almost squatting.'*

On the surface, Annette's motivation to enhance resilience against crises and times of need lies in contrast to Karaline's motivation for joining, which she stated is:

*'To do things with and for other people, and not for real money.'*

Over coffee, at the core-team meeting Karaline explained that she prefers giving rather than receiving. She emphasised her personal desire to provide for others' needs, stating that:

*'I need a ladder that can get up to peoples' roofs because there's a real need for that'.*

The satisfaction that she feels from giving to others is made explicit when she highlighted that:

*'To be in LETS and enjoy it you must get satisfaction out of doing a service for somebody'.*

The repeated emphasis on 'satisfaction' indicates that in satisfying others' requests she satisfies her own desire to contribute. This is because, through reciprocal giving, Karaline assures personal security in the future and establishes belonging within the group. Like Annette, exercising her personal agency to give to others may therefore be seen, not as pure altruism, but in the interest of enhancing personal resilience.

Despite their differences in emphasis, Karaline and Annette both make the conscious decision to engage in reciprocal interaction through LETS in order to ensure their own personal resilience against times of isolation and vulnerability. This reassurance is particularly pertinent based on the high number of LETS members that suffer from illness or isolation. As Karaline, who suffers from multiple sclerosis, comments:

*'LETS works where people have been taken out of the conventional commercial world of 'OK GET MY JOB and then 80% of my life IS MY JOB and then I've got this little bit left over, it works where people have been taken out of that functioning.'*

Rather than remaining helpless, members actively seek out opportunities to trade with others, which results in their common experience of reassurance and satisfaction, whether this is through giving or receiving.

However, trading in LETS also goes some way towards satisfying an ideological sentiment shared among LETS members. Resilience practices which meet immediate practical needs were also found to stem from a concerned and often pessimistic outlook for the future. A fear of the future was commonly expressed among LETS members and this is demonstrated in the following interview excerpt from Karaline:

*K: I'm quite worried about the world at the moment (..) um I hate what I hear on the news, there's so much craziness and um I think we've got too many people on the planet and we're going to be killing each other (..) very soon, whether we're doing it with global warming or whether we're doing it with bombs and weapons*

*C: Does being part of LETS make you feel like its addressing some kind of issue?*

*K: I wish it was (..) I wish it was being successful in addressing what's obviously going wrong all over the (..) PLANET (do you want any sugar in that- Mike offers) um yeah there's this GREAT GOD of money and it's not EVEN HUMAN, its big business now. Its big business that's got so much power its lost any humanity, and it has the power to manipulate governance and all this sort of thing, and LETS, to me, is a little microcosm of how society should be, our own little Government, our own little rules, you know, SMAAAALL, LITTLE, CLOSE. That's my belief (laughs) human level rights and wrongs.*

As highlighted by the exclamation 'I wish it was', the shared understanding among members is that LETS currently occupies a niche that in itself cannot fully address issues of climate change and global sustainability. The limitations of the LETS system are also noted by Dave, the chairman, who states that:

*'We're not functioning as an alternative economy- we're providing a sort of layer of things on top.'*

With regard to the challenges facing society, Dave states that, 'I wish I could do more', while Karaline elaborates upon these feelings of helplessness and frustration:

*'I'm very frustrated that I can't do very much, there's huge, huge issues happening out there and we're all so helpless.'*

Nevertheless, conducting reciprocal practices allows members to exercise their agency in order to have a lifestyle that is more fulfilling and, in their view, morally upright. Although members of Bristol LETS do not live completely self-sufficiently, they are able to experience satisfaction by exercising personal agency at a local level through their membership of LETS. For example, Karaline comments:

*'I can only, I SUPPOSE, do what I can...I try in my own little patch to live like I'd like people to live'.*

Whilst being aware of global challenges through signing petitions and donating money to worthy causes, her perspective and interests remain at a local level: 'my own little patch'. Action is matched to ability, and however insignificant the action in relation to the global scale, it is the ability to exercise personal agency to uphold one's values that is exemplified among members. There is the sense that, as well as satisfying immediate practical and emotional needs, conducting reciprocal practices of resilience allows members to live in a manner that they consider to be morally upright. Personal psychological 'resilience' through upholding their ideological beliefs in this way upholds an ideology about the 'resilience' of humanity on a global scale.

However, it is important to consider the age of participants when analysing these findings. As noted previously, interviewees at Bristol LETS fall into a slightly higher age bracket than those at Lammas and the Dane County Timebank. Their more advanced age is perhaps reflected in the services that are traded between them. Figure Ten shows that the number of offers is large and varied, particularly in sedentary, creative and therapeutic activities; while the range of requests is limited to physical needs such as DIY, Gardening, Household and Transportation. This mismatch of offers and wants perhaps suggests that some requests at Bristol LETS may not be met due to the homogenous demographic of its members.

The more advanced age of LETS members may also influence their motivations and ideological perspectives. For example, members express the notion of adaptation by necessity in which they do not initiate but instead wait for social change to occur, as Karaline states:

*'If we can keep LETS going, if society is having to change then we're already there with a basic philosophy (.) if we can keep it going, to go 'ok we're here to be used', that's MY feeling but hey(.) I'll be dead long before we get to that point (laughs).'*

Here Karaline expresses the altruistic desire to leave a positive legacy for the future, to meet the needs of distant others. While LETS members might hold this more-than-personal aim, the personal benefits are also in knowing that one has contributed towards enhancing the resilience of future generations and feeling the satisfaction of this moral endeavour. However, Karaline's cynical tone here alludes to her pessimistic view of a future in which LETS is used under conditions in which society is 'having to change'. This assumption justifies the use of minimal action among those of a more advanced age or with limited capacity, and also relates to the feelings of helplessness expressed by Bristol LETS members. Because the importance of LETS is seen to depend on its future rather than immediate economic necessity, personal agency is therefore limited by the ideological nature of participation, as noted by Dave's repetition of 'idea' in the following statement:

*'My main reason for joining was an ecological-ideological one. It's an idea which could be part of a much bigger idea and that's probably the biggest reason for me joining.'*

Therefore on a social level LETS is not a protest movement, and members do not directly push for immediate social change to prevent a crisis despite expressing a sense of *personal* resilience against global challenges. This is evident in the lack of urgency expressed by Dave, who admits that:

*'There hasn't been anything terribly organised in terms of recruitment'.*

Instead, he states that he is 'prepared to wait' for membership numbers to rise. This alludes to the belief that LETS offers a reciprocal social structure that is 'waiting in the wings' to provide resilience in an uncertain future in which society must prepare for the possibility of a social and economic crises. Based on an implicit fear of the future, members experience feelings of pride and security through contributing towards such preparation for a potential socio-economic or environmental disaster. For Dave, LETS offers:

*'The feeling that something is being done (.) and you're involved in something that MIGHT turn into something bigger if things happen to our economy you know (haha) we're developing something that is a bit more resilient.'*

Here Dave uses the term 'resilient' to describe the practices conducted at Bristol LETS. Indeed, factors supporting resilience play an important role as exposure to risk factors increases, such as the risk of natural disasters including floods or droughts. However, even when such risks are not immediately perceptible, some individuals actively prepare for

emergencies, including possible disruptions in the social or political order (Hammer, 2009). This 'Survivalism' movement has, since the 1960's, focussed on emergency and self-defence training, stockpiling food and water and preparing to become self-sufficient, while adherents of the back-to-the-land movement share similar interests in self-sufficiency and preparedness. Importantly, these 'survivalist' strategies have also been suggested as strategies that aim to enhance personal and psychological resilience, allowing individuals to better adapt to stress and adversity on a personal level (APA, 2014).

In this respect, the distinction between personal and community resilience may be blurred, and indeed, Dave's use of the word 'resilient' suggests an overlap in meaning between the survivalist practices of LETS at the level of communities and societies, and the personal psychological resilience experienced by group members.

## **2.2 Lammas**

Within the Lammas community, personal resilience or 'survivalism' is more fervently pursued in response to the ideological belief in social and economic collapse and the desire for a better quality of life; and in doing so, Lammas residents have both physically and psychologically separated themselves from 'the mainstream' of society.



*Tao's dwelling under construction, photo sourced from [www.greenbuildingpress.co.uk](http://www.greenbuildingpress.co.uk)*

From his self-built, barn-style house, tucked away in the valleys of West Wales, founder Tao Wimbush confirms with a tone of calm acceptance, that within Lammas:

*'There is a fairly universal feeling here (.) that mainstream society is not only (..) unsustainable but actually in a process of (..) decline or collapse and that there is a need to (..) pioneer other ways of living'.*

It appears that Lammass was therefore constructed, not only to benefit its' residents, but also as a centre of research, demonstration, and training, as it aims to benefit society at large through lessons and demonstrations in how to live sustainably.

Notably, Tao's rational acceptance that 'massive change is underway' does not appear to be accompanied by the same feelings of helplessness and frustration observed among members of LETS, who remain embedded within a relatively mainstream urban community. In contrast, Tao impartially observes:

*'The fact that our society is dysfunctional to the point where it is threatening, not just human beings but the whole ecosystem...brings up quite a lot of distress naturally within people.'*

For Tao and his family, five years of hard work, determination, vision and expertise has rewarded them with a comfortable, almost self-sufficient and holistic lifestyle, situated within a rural environment. During the interview it appeared through his demeanour that achieving a self-sufficient lifestyle goes some way towards minimising any feelings of helplessness and distress that he may have regarding an uncertain future.



*Tao's dwelling and surrounding land, personal photograph taken 16th January 2014*





*Tao and family inside his completed house, photo sourced from [www.rin-hamburgh.co.uk](http://www.rin-hamburgh.co.uk)*

The embodied experience of sustainable living seems to provide Lammas residents with a deeper sense of security with regards to the future than participation in Bristol LETS, which is described as being a 'supplement' to daily life. However, even the physical separation of Lammas from mainstream society does not offer complete insulation against global environmental crises. Rather *the act itself* of living autonomously, self-sufficiently, and in accordance with their values appears to give residents an immediate sense of personal resilience. For example Tao states that:

*'We've reached a point on our plot now where...we can feed ourselves and we can fuel ourselves and we're managing fine, it's not AN AIM because we're too interconnected with everyone else on this planet for it to be a solution in itself but it does bring with it a sense of empowerment and strength (.) and security.'*

A feeling of empowerment seems to be experienced by Lammas residents through living and embodying what sustainability really looks like. This involves building and living in ones' own shelter, growing vegetables, understanding and implementing an off-grid energy supply, making household items from local resources and crafting and selling items at Christmas markets. In order to make 75 percent of their income from the land, as the Welsh Government's 'One Planet Development' regulations state, residents must engage in a wide variety of practical activities on a daily basis. For example, Leanne has for the past four years resided in a small caravan plot, where she explains:

*'I do all my paperwork, where two volunteers spun a whole fleece in December by hand, we've got fermented foods brewing, cooking, it's just amazing what happens in this caravan, its mad its REALL REALLY MAD (laughs). I'm just about to start propagating plants,*



*I'm just about to start sawing this up to make chopping boards (she points at large wooden plank) and right now it's time to start thinking about making my own washing powder.'*

In order to achieve a livelihood that is both personally resilient and independent from the structures of provision; one is required to become a 'Jack-of-all-trades', through learning about a huge variety of topics and developing a wide range of skills. As Tao states:

*'In order to be successful you need to understand so much about going back to the basics, you learn so much about the nature of soil, you know the fact that soil under a tree is COMPLETELY different, totally different material to soil under grass, and that's just one thing- the nature of stone, the nature of wood, the nature of water, in the context of a climate that is growing ever more erratic. It's a completely different education, it's an education in itself, we're not learning about Henry the Eighth or Trigonometry or chemical reactions but it's a whole (...) it involves animal husbandry, financial structures and how to effectively manage resources, time and volunteers, dealing with bureaucracy and so many aspects of it.'*

The personal motivation to engage in this learning experience seems, for Lammas residents, to be associated with a feeling of autonomy: the ownership and management of their own livelihoods. For example, Leanne found, through working for corporations such as the BBC and Carpenter and Crew, that:

*'The thing of do as you're told and don't ask any questions, you know somebody else does the thinking for you, you just follow the orders, I find that a bit (..) it doesn't suit me'.*

Instead, she is driven to live and embody her own ideals of what it means to live a good life. The sense of purpose afforded by managing her livelihood completely autonomously and in the service of her own ideals, provides Leanne with a high level of motivation to learn and achieve something new every day. When doing her January finances and record-keeping, she comments that:

*'I can see if I've progressed or where I've not done so well this year, so, yeah I'm making plans for next year as well so THESE are the priorities, THIS would be nice to do, THESE are the things that have to happen you know.'*

It appears that this high level of motivation stems from a personal ownership of, investment in, and responsibility for the project at hand. Her personal resilience is invested in the achievement of her goals, and so rather than remaining apathetic in response to her ideals, Leanne has decided to bravely exercise her agency and autonomy, which she describes as 'very exciting, it's scary but it is really amazing.'

Leanne is motivated to attain the level of resilience enjoyed by Tao and his family, while Tao is motivated by working towards the more-than-personal goal of providing, as he states, 'a viable and accessible route for ordinary people to get out of the mainstream.' In

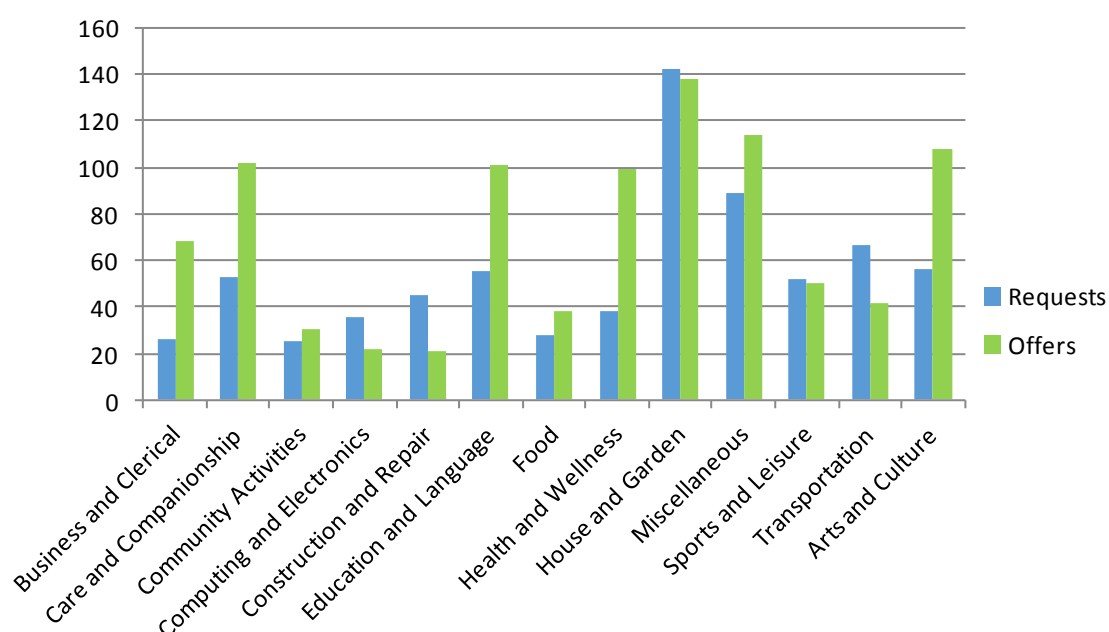
this way Tao is able to achieve, as he states, ‘personal evolution’, through working towards the resilience of future generations. The achievement of these goals results an apparent feeling of pride in his life’s work, which is expressed as Tao points out of his front window to the features of his property:

*‘You’ve got my polytunnel there, and there’s a standing stone next to it, well that standing stone is the first thing I did on this plot...it’s a kind of place of focus for me. You can’t quite make out but there’s a large white crystal on the top of that hill, that’s kind of in the centre of my hazel nuttree, my apple orchard and my damson orchard and (...) (exhale, smile) that’s just on a micro scale, I mean down the valley...it’s a real sacred place.’*

### 2.3 Dane County Timebank

The experience of personal resilience is also highly salient among members of the Dane County Timebank. Within the culture and context of Madison, Wisconsin, the desire for individuals to enhance their personal resilience is emphasised. For many, the Timebank provides an essential means by which the necessities of daily life can be met at no financial cost. In contrast to the mismatch seen in Bristol LETS’ transaction graph, a greater synergy can be seen here between the offers and requests of Timebank members. The range of requests is far greater and more varied than at LETS, and these are met by a balanced distribution of offers.

Figure Eleven: Online ‘requests’ and ‘offers’ made by members of DCTB



It is clear by the size and activity of the Dane County Timebank, that it is much more, as its founder, Stephanie Rearick envisages:

*'Integrated, and part and parcel of the fabric of people's lives and not even a question'.*

The Timebank provides an open online space in which admitting the need for help with daily chores, household maintenance or companionship is both acceptable and encouraged. Furthermore, the range and creativity of the services offered by members indicates a compassionate understanding of the needs faced by others, along with a willingness to provide personal services that meet those needs. The apparent humility inherent in the many requests for 'organising my home', 'somebody to go out with', 'companionship in my home', 'transport to church' along with the compassion inherent in offers such as 'I will go out with you', 'I would love to chat with you' and 'help around your home', fosters a sense of openness and honesty within the Timebank community. While resilience in Lammas is pursued as more of a personal endeavour, the needs-based compassion evident within the Dane County Timebank appears to ensure the collective resilience of members through community activities.

The realisation of this support network is empowering as it promotes a mentality of optimism when undertaking daily activities as each undertaking provides the possibility for community connection. A personal experience highlights this mentality: during my first meeting with Stephanie she enquired as to whether or not I was using a bicycle. I was aware that cycling is a popular and convenient means of transport in Madison, and would have preferred to cycle than walk around the city, however, due to the short duration of my stay I dismissed the possibility of renting a bicycle. Stephanie suggested that I advertise on the Timebank, reassuring me that finding a bicycle for free and at short notice would not be a problem. This suggestion was my first introduction to the mentality of Timebanking, in which daily obstacles are not tolerated as sources of helplessness and frustration but are instead seen as exciting challenges to be overcome through exercising one's right and access to the free support of a caring and compassionate community.

Resilience is enhanced among some members as their most basic needs are met through the Timebank. For example, Joe, who suffers from Multiple Sclerosis, helps to cook monthly meals for the 'Wellness Project', which is run as part of the Timebank, to provide, as Joe states:

*'The social event of getting together with people, you know, and feeding people and then the other side is that I get to eat then too, aha, that's a big part'.*

During the two years that Joe has volunteered at the Timebank, he has not spent any of his acquired hours. As with Karaline, a similarly vulnerable LETS member, Joe's contribution is exercised in self-interest, to satisfy the basic need for nutritious food. For him, the Timebank also works as a kind of savings account or pension scheme, providing security against times of need. He states that only after building up so many hours does he:

*'Feel comfortable enough to now say, this is something that I need and I can reach out to find somebody to help me with the things that I need.'*

Like Karaline, he makes use of reciprocal trading agreements to establish belonging within the group and therefore assure personal security in the future. In the absence of welfare provision, taking responsibility for their own and each other's welfare has led DCTB members to actively coordinate voluntary welfare provision at the grassroots. This sense of responsibility promotes a more active and engaged awareness of the ways in which social needs can be met collectively, which lies in contrast to the relative frustration and apathy experienced among LETS members. In order to become receivers of the social welfare provided by their peers, Timebank members are also required, to the best of their ability, to give of their assets and skills. In this regard Katie, a Timebank employee emphasises that 'it doesn't matter who you are, you can offer something.' For example, Joe joined the Timebank because of:

*'The different things she (a yoga teacher and Timebank member) had asked for help with, and it was just like a natural progression'.*

In becoming valued, he experienced a similar 'personal evolution' to that of Tao at Lammas, as the Timebank allowed him to, as he states:

*'Use what I have to offer and what my friends have to offer to be able to give to people who might just need to be in a social situation or they need to have food you know.'*

By providing a 'reason to get together' through the Wellness Project and a platform by which members can contribute in simple ways, the Timebank is able to release the assets of each individual, to meet sustenance needs as well as more the complex emotional desire to be valued and respected. These activities are therefore argued to contribute towards enhancing members' personal resilience.

Within the American cultural context, the notion of personal betterment appears to be highly valued among both vulnerable and skilled members of society, and the Timebank contributes towards this through reciprocal skills-swaps, for example through talks, classes

and private tuition. Katie, who does care work for the Medical Transport project comments that:

*'A couple of things that I'd really like to learn to do are, I don't really know how to use the sewing machine and it's like well (.) I want to go and earn these hours gardening so that I can go out and (..) you know, even just better my OWN LIFE SKILLS (emphasis).'*

According to Katie, the potential to better oneself through learning new skills 'even just from community members is awesome', and this provides the personal incentive for members of any age and ability to engage in community work and in that way enhance their own resilience through trading skills without exchanging money.

In a culture that values personal success very highly within the context of private ownership and minimal welfare provision, tales of achievement are commonly told among Timebank members. Indeed, Stephanie's strong belief in the choice, agency and responsibility of each individual plays an important role in empowering others to exercise their personal agency through the Timebank. Her passion is based on the acceptance and understanding that, as she states:

*'If we can't figure out NOW how to stop killing ourselves and the planet then we'll just go extinct and that will be fine and that will be required... and if we do realise it then we'll do something differently.'*

'Survival', not only of each individual, but ultimately of our species as a whole, is therefore engrained within discourses of personal resilience. The link between personal resilience, firstly among the needier, and ecological resilience becomes clear in Stephanie's overall objective:

*'Getting people into their interests and out of destructive jobs I think might be number one for ecological sustainability'.*

Stephanie approaches the environmental crisis through investing in people. She aims to empower Timebank members by building an initiative that enables collective agency through behaving sustainably or through undertaking meaningful and healthy work. From observations of group events and meetings, it appears that this social approach to sustainability is most readily accepted within the more disadvantaged communities of Madison, where enhancing 'personal resilience' might coincide with promoting 'ecological resilience', and this integration is no more evident than in Allied Drive, one of the more disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Madison.

### 2.3.1 Observations of the Allied Co-op Energy Project meeting

The Wellness Centre of the Allied Drive Community, the location of the DCTB 'Power Time' meeting, is situated across Lake Wingra from Madison. The neighbourhood has a large African American and Hispanic population and compared to the relatively prosperous Madison, Allied Drive suffers clear income disadvantages, high crime rates, unemployment and conflict. The area has also been subject to neighbourhood discrimination by city planners, who repeatedly neglect to fund local projects in favour of investing in more well-off areas. The neighbourhood has no grocery store, forcing residents to travel for one hour by bus to buy food in Madison, or to eat at the 'Mac Donald's' or 'Subway' situated on a strip mall on the neighbourhood outskirts, just off an intersection of the motorway. Given the low-income of many residents and the negative health implications of poor diet, the Allied Co-op has facilitated a container gardening project and green carts selling fresh produce in order to help residents to eat healthily.

Deprivation in this area has resulted in a strong sense of community, expressed in a sincere and heartfelt plea to improve the community situation through the Timebank. Allied Drive has a very strong neighbourhood identity, and the community's interests are invested in its maintenance and improvement, as well as in the wellbeing of vulnerable residents living within its boundaries. For example, one attendee exclaimed,

*'I want the Co-op. The Co-op must happen! If I must be on the core group then I will. I'll do what it takes to make the Co-op happen.'*

A sense of neighbourhood solidarity in Allied Drive is also evident in their positive online statement:

*'Ours is an eclectic neighbourhood. To a remarkable degree it mirrors all races and cultures in the greater Madison area. Its residents include infants, elderly and every age in between. Occupations range from labourers to doctors, with a good dose of students. We straddle two cities, are within biking distance of both the Capitol and the countryside and have at our front door a mall, at our back door a marsh and on our right flank the great University of Wisconsin Arboretum.'*

However, the selection of posters and leaflets available at the Allied Wellness Centre painted a different picture of community life. These offer help and advice for sufferers of HIV and Aids, drug abuse and domestic violence. Financial deprivation has resulted in high levels of conflict, crime and illegal activity within the neighbourhood, and has led to, as Stephanie explains, a 'my turf, your turf' mentality. This survivalist attitude represents a struggle to ensure the 'resilience' of loved ones above and beyond others in the

neighbourhood. Ironically, this situation both necessitates and is opposed to a co-operative structure that builds resource sharing within the community, presenting potent challenges for the Allied Community Co-op.



*Figure Twelve: Land use in the Allied Drive Neighbourhood*

The Energy Project meeting was organised on behalf of the Allied Community Co-op, which won funding for a year before going into recession due to lack of stimulus. The Energy Project has been incorporated in order to attract more funding and revive the neighbourhood. After applying for \$43,000 to develop a resilient energy system, the project received only \$3000. Nevertheless, the inclusion of the Energy Project has resulted in renewed enthusiasm for a resident-driven co-operative, aimed not only at building community ties but also on sustainable development and employment. This has led to the involvement of more men in the co-operative and a renewed sense of purpose.

The Energy Project comprises a community outreach team of volunteers selected from the Allied Wellness Centre's Welcomer Club. They earn Timebank hours for visiting properties in the neighbourhood and advising Timebank residents on simple ways to save energy in their home or apartment, as well as highlighting the significant impact these measures may have on their utility bill. The 'Energy Project' meeting described here was attended by six

African American residents (four women, two men), most of whom are involved in one or more aspects of the Allied Community Co-op, of which the DCTB is one partner.

The need for this initiative is particularly profound given the record-breaking winter of 2013, when temperatures during the 'polar vortex' reached -35 degrees Celsius in Madison, and freezing ice storms meant that it was dangerous to leave the house for more than 15 minutes. As a result, energy bills were on average 30 percent higher from December-February compared to an average winter. As expressed by Annette Millar, a representative from MGE, an electricity supply company in Madison that works to engage poorer areas, 'these bills hurt'. MGE have experienced a large amount of 'walk-ins' by those whose gas was turned off on the 21<sup>st</sup> March due to non-payment. In contrast to Madison, in the Allied Community, 'everyone's nervous about how they're going to pay their bills'. The meeting began with sharing stories around energy use and the difficulties experienced. While the context was of survival and the tone of the meeting was deeply humbling, shared experiences were met with compassion and reassurances of community support. Annette then provided members with general tips on energy saving and comprehensive information packs to each volunteer along with merchandised temperature readers to be used as an incentive, allowing volunteers to 'get in the door' and overcome resident hostility. However, despite this evidence of neighbourhood hostility, Mr. John Murphy, a sensitive and humble elderly volunteer, commented that:

*'It's fun, especially if you know people, and even when it's strangers. There's lots of nice people in this neighbourhood.'*



*Residents of Allied Drive at DCTB Power Time meeting, photo sourced from <http://blog.timeftw.org/>*

The focus of the Energy Project is to enhance 'resilience' within the Allied Drive community by teaching community members how to save energy and manage their monthly energy



bills. This was exemplified when Annette asked, 'we all know what this is all about right?' The group's reply was 'money', to which she responded, 'choices, how convenient do you want your life to be?' For these individuals, the decision to save energy therefore seems to involve a balance in the considerations of saving money and ensuring convenience, rather than an explicit consideration of the environment.

Along with the DCTB Energy Project, MGE representative Annette Miller also leads the 'New Green Challenge'. This campaign challenged members of Madison's African American and Latino communities to live greener lives for six months, with the theme: 'We Come from the Land' focussing on how African American and Latino cultures connect to sustainability. The eighteen participating households reported that they appreciated the connection between their cultural past and modern sustainability. Sina Davis, a member of both the Energy Project and the New Green Challenge stated that:

*'Sustainable living to me is saving energy, being able to monitor my money, keeping my thermostat at 68F.'*

Sustainability is therefore understood in practical, rather than ideological terms, as saving energy 'sustainably' goes hand in hand with saving money. Sina exercises her personal agency in the interests of her own survival and wellbeing. Although the New Green Challenge demonstrates a clearer drive towards sustainable living, the motivations for individuals to engage with this campaign were also practical, that is, to enhance their own and their community's resilience, while environmental values appeared to remain secondary. For example, Sina Davis states that:

*'Just learning and empowering ourselves is the reason I chose to do this. Just learning how to read my account, my bill, saving money for my daughter and I is a learning thing, budgeting is a learning thing, it's something that we exercise'.*

Empowerment is therefore achieved through learning how to save energy, as this contributes towards enhancing her resilience. Through the New Green Challenge, Sina also had the opportunity to grow vegetables on a plot of land nearby. She explains that the benefits of eating food from the land are that it promotes a healthier lifestyle, more energy and a longer life. She also states that:

*'Why I think it's important for my community to live a more sustainable lifestyle is saving, it's healthier. Learning and educating and empowering ourselves is SO important (emphasis).'*

These statements provide evidence of the personal motivations for disadvantaged individuals around Madison to engage in sustainable behaviours. While environmental

values do not feature heavily in the discourses of Allied residents, the motivation to act lies in the interests of enhancing personal survival, resilience and wellbeing.

### **3. Existential Thinking**

The most common theme within the domain of 'personal agency', the pursuit and experience of 'resilience', indicates the way in which group members participate in the selected initiatives for personal reasons, often to meet practical or emotional needs. However, the second most common phenomenon within the 'personal' domain is concerned with aspirations beyond the self (Hartelius *et al.*, 2007). These experiential phenomena are best described through the term: 'existential thinking'.

Following Gardner's definition (1999), existential thinking is the tendency to engage with ultimate concerns and the capacity to carry out a meaning-making process that locates oneself in relation to existential issues such as the significance of life and the meaning of death (Allan and Shearer, 2012). The active cognitive process of locating oneself within a wider existential context places this experience within the domain of personal agency. Existential thinking involves exercising personal agency to make sense of one's existence (Spinelli, 2005), which is referred to as meaning-making (the search for meaning), and this may translate to the felt experience of life's meaningfulness in some circumstances (the presence of meaning). Several scholars have discussed the therapeutic benefit of addressing existential issues; however, people differ considerably in how often they contemplate them (Yalom, 1980; Spinelli, 2005).

#### **3.1 Bristol LETS**

Within Bristol LETS, 'existential thinking' was demonstrated consistently although to varying extents. While certain members indulged in existential conversation, others provided little evidence of this phenomenon. Although some members might engage in private existential thinking, their willingness to discuss these values depended on their individual openness, the level of rapport achieved in interview, and consequently the depth and nature of the questions asked.

Existential thinking commonly became evident in response to the general question: How did you become involved in LETS? Interviewees' responses were predominantly value-based, for example Dave stated that:

*'My main reason for joining was an ecological-ideological one. It's an idea which could be part of a much bigger idea and that's probably the biggest reason for me joining.'*

Mary, the secretary of LETSLink UK, also explained that 'producing more money trashes the planet' and so her involvement in LETS aims to fix the economic system in order to 'sort out the planet'. Similarly, Mike comments that:

*'Well personally I feel it's the right way for people to live, to support each other without expecting to make a profit out of it.'*

These statements indicate that each person has, through their own reasoning, located themselves in relation to existential issues such as the significance, purpose, and ultimate fate of life on Earth (Allan and Shearer, 2012). For example, existential thinking that leads to an 'ecological-ideological' position on the place of humans on planet Earth could lead to a strong moral precedent determining the 'right way to live', for example, to live in accordance with the ecological principles of fairness and reciprocity, 'without expecting to make a profit'. At its core LETS is a 'philosophy', as Karaline states:

*'Because the philosophy of it, the idea is such a powerful idea, it has not died out'.*

Group members exercise personal agency in seeking the active realisation of their philosophical values in order to achieve the felt experience of meaningfulness in life.

Meaningfulness Theory states that meaning is found when one realizes that they are able to effectively achieve their goals through successful life-management by societal standards (Feldman and Snyder, 2005). However, meaningfulness, for LETS members, involves rejecting societal standards of success, in favour of existential understandings of what it means to lead a 'good' and 'successful' life. Personal agency is evoked in creating meaning because, as Feldman and Snyder (2005) state, 'it is through the realization that one is the sole being responsible for rendering life meaningful that values are actualized and life becomes meaningful.' The following excerpt demonstrates the way in which Karaline openly and spontaneously discusses her existential values:

*C: What made you like it though?*

*K: I've just always loved the idea of it you know, doing things with and for people (..) and not for real money (..) I dunno that that (...) does things for me (laughs) I like it*

*C: Is there any other values apart from not using money?*

*K: Its (...) it is social, I like that I meet people who have got a sort of similar attitude to what life is ABOUT and what doing things for others is about, and I'm not attracted to people who are real money-heads going to study business and this and that because they want to make a killing, so its political and social as well for me, it's where they overlap. I think well oh yeah I meet nice people now! (laughs)*

*C: So everyone has this idea of what life's about, what's that?*

*K: Life is about (...) learning, expressing yourself as much as you can, doing things with and for people (...) anything I do I want to do because of the love of doing it, not because I'm going to get paid for it (passionate, indignant tone)*

Karaline's desire to socialise with people 'who have a similar attitude to what life is about' suggests that the people she refers to have indeed considered 'what life is about' and have joined LETS in order to share their understanding and experience with like-minded people. For them meaning is found, not through the accumulation of material possessions, but through the immaterial values of 'learning, expressing yourself as much as you can, and doing things with and for people'. Through collectively enacting these social values, LETS members experience meaningfulness in life. Indeed, this social aspect of meaning creation is corroborated by Stillman *et al.* (2009) who found that social exclusion results in a perceived loss of meaningfulness in life.

This is not to suggest that 'money-heads going to study business because they want to make a killing' do not engage in existential thinking or indeed find meaning through becoming financially successful. However, their phenomenological *experience* of meaning may differ. While accumulating wealth may result in personal satisfaction, Karaline states that:

*'To be in LETS and enjoy it you must get satisfaction out of doing a service for somebody.'*

LETS members allude to the phenomenological experience of 'meaningfulness' through giving as being heartfelt and joyful. For example, Karaline finds meaning through giving and receiving, as for her:

*'It's always been about 'you get what you put in out of life' and building up a big bank balance isn't the issue, it's getting out what you put in, join this, get involved, do it! And that's the joy of life.'*

In describing LETS members, Dave also comments that:

*'They like this idea of exchange between people; they just love the idea of trading between each other'.*

His use of the word 'love' points to the apparent significance of giving and receiving within LETS. These practical everyday acts seem to be imbued with meaning through their existential significance: compassionate acts of giving work to uphold a moral standpoint that rejects materialism and personal wealth accumulation in favour of values such as 'caring for humanity'. However, there is no one definitive way in which a person can establish meaning in life, as meaningfulness is the subjective evaluation of how successfully

one has managed to achieve a sense of purpose, efficacy, value and a positive self-worth in their life (Baumeister, 1996).

An important factor to note in analysing the practice of 'existential thinking' is that many Bristol LETS members are middle-aged to elderly, while several suffer from ill health. As such, members expressed an awareness of mortality during group discussion and interviews. For example, when discussing the economic future, Karaline exclaims, 'I'll be dead long before we get to that point (laughs)'. According to Frias *et al.* (2011) when made to reflect on their deaths, people tend to report a greater sense of gratitude and see life as a limited and valuable resource. This sense of 'gratitude' might explain why, as Mike states, 'the older generation don't like accepting gifts', preferring acts of reciprocity. Indeed, gratitude and compassion were shown between members at the core-team meeting, as they shared experiences of ill-health. As a result of their engagement with existential issues such as death, LETS members might consequently experience meaningfulness through practicing gratitude, reciprocity and compassion within their social circle.

Although 'existential thinking' may just satisfy the simple desire to make sense of one's existence (Spinelli, 2005), it could also be argued that moral 'existential' values such as thrift, anti-consumerism, voluntary simplicity and reciprocity may be purposefully employed by people 'on the fringes of the conventional, commercial world' in order to either justify their social positioning or enhance their self-esteem. According to Terror Management Theory, self-esteem reduces the 'mortal anxiety', and for somebody who is retired or with a low monthly income, the expression of anti-consumer values as part of their identity might work to enhance their self-esteem or minimise anxiety (Greenburg *et al.* 1986). In this way, group members may be argued to reconstruct mainstream values and expectations about living meaningfully and productively in society. Existential values may also influence the career choices of group members. For example, in relation to anti-consumerism, Karaline states that:

*'I have always had that ethos...I was happier working as a computer programmer for the council than for Microsoft.'*

This statement indicates that, for her, meaningfulness was 'always' found in her existential values regardless of her age or position within society. Furthermore, it suggests that anti-capitalist values resulting from existential thinking may be one factor influencing interviewees' professions as well as their decision to partake in the chosen initiatives.

### 3.2 Lammas

Among the residents of Lammas, 'existential thinking' was evident in the thoughtful statements and comments made during interviews. Residents spontaneously adopted a philosophical approach to answering questions, which sometimes led to discussions on existential topics. Again, 'existential thinking' played an important role in deciding to become an ecovillage resident, and both Tao and Leanne described 'transformative moments' (Hards, 2011) that changed the trajectory of their life-courses.

During his time at University, Tao visited Tipi Valley, another ecovillage in Wales, and was inspired by finding:

*'A whole alternative society, living largely independently...tying human beings to the Earth.'*

Similarly, Leanne spontaneously recounted seeing people on a farm in Fife who were not earning much money but were happy, and states that this was when she *'started to think about wellbeing and what's important in life.'* She also recounts:

*'Standing in Tesco's buying some carrots and looking at them in a plastic bag and thinking, this is mad, I want somewhere to grow my carrots at some stage.'*

These early experiences point to, as Karaline at LETS describes, the process of considering what 'life is about' and acting according to those values. Although innumerable people experience buying carrots in Tesco's, the act of placing a strong moral judgement on the experience requires 'existential thinking', that is, coming to a meaningful conclusion about how to behave by locating oneself in relation to existential issues such as the significance of life and the meaning of death (Allan and Shearer, 2012). For Leanne, this simple act became a 'transformative moment' (Hards, 2011), as it was imbued with existential significance. It became meaningful for her in relation to the environmental consequences of mass consumption and pollution, and therefore to the fate of our species. Furthermore, this existential thinking did not result in helplessness and apathy, but appears to have inspired her to act through establishing a moral precedent to live her life by.

The moral position resulting from Lammas residents' 'existential thinking' has led to dramatic changes in their circumstances that require both courage and determination to accomplish. Leanne found, through working for corporations such as the BBC and Carpenter and Crew that her philosophical attitude did not suit work in the corporate sector. She states that:

*'I wasn't very interested in the competitive nature, all that sort of stuff. I'm interested in team work but I think it's having (.) its people being motivated by a vision (.) or having a sense of (.) something good.'*

Her strong moral sentiment against the competitive and money-oriented commercial world and her desire to be around 'like-minded people' has subsequently driven her to embark on what she describes as, the 'incredible experience of arriving in a field and trying to live in a field from the start'. The physical reality of this experience, as she admits 'is pretty grim and primitive', as on that cold winter's evening her interview was conducted in a caravan semi-submerged in mud and flood-water, with water dripping from the ceiling. Therefore, in order to find the motivation to undertake such a challenging and long-term project, Leanne was clear and resolute in her ambition. She recounted that at a Community Supported Agriculture meeting:

*'I suddenly felt some sort of connection back to land in a way that I knew that I wanted...I just knew that I wanted to live sustainably but I didn't know how'.*

As she described her experiences of travelling around the world, farming and learning permaculture, she explained that she was 'on a journey', but rather than being an aimless and indiscriminate exploration, she was 'slowly refining the options down', looking to find the means for a livelihood that could fulfil the moral precedent that was set in stone through her early existential realisations.

Finally, her application to live at Lammas was denied, however Leanne's apparent determination to realise her dream led her to request volunteer work, at which point she was informed that the plot had again become available. Evidence of her existential thinking therefore appears to be followed by a determined belief in her own abilities and a refusal to accept principles or ways of life that she deems to be unethical. Finally, after four years and despite the journey being 'scary', she states that:

*'I had my aim, I wanted some land, I wanted to do business on the land, I had a dream that one day we might be able to build a house but I didn't know how.'*

While struggling against the daily stresses and strains of 'living in a field', Lammas residents seem to focus, not on what is lacking in terms of physical comfort, but on their progression towards the strong and clear vision of an ideal. This focus, combined with a broad perspective on their own life-course, provides reassurance, allowing them to accept even the most difficult times as an essential part of an on-going process. These understandings are grounded in experience. For example, Tao explains that:

*'There's always going to be challenges and there is a friction because that is the human condition, you know (...) our evolutionary process as individuals often requires periods of friction in order to wake us up (clicks fingers) so that we can evolve and expand our awareness.'*

Similarly, Leanne explains that, for her, winter used to feel like an endurance test but now she experiences it as:

*'A process, this is the rest and repair time of year, and I've never experienced winter like that before, it doesn't matter how hard it is, that's the process.'*

The ability to accept challenging life circumstances with optimism, as part of an ongoing life project, reflects a certain 'existential' perspective on life as a process. Tao is therefore able to reflect on his life journey to conclude that:

*'It's a relationship to the Earth that has enabled me to evolve as a human being'.*

Lammas residents are also philosophical in other aspects, for example in discussing social dynamics, the politics of power and environmentalism, but with regard to their own lives, they exhibit a strong and existential 'belief in themselves', that is, they are empowered by strong self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura 1997). Indeed, Leanne exhibits self-efficacy as she concludes her interview with the empowering insight that:

*'Everything is within us, it's not without us, we live in a world where we think it's all outside us, and it's really a simple lesson to learn, it's inside you not outside you.'*

Similarly, the extent to which Tao believes in his own self-efficacy comes down to, as he states, 'core spiritual beliefs'. As with Karaline at LETS, he then openly and spontaneously imparts a profound reflection on death, his conviction that:

*'My job is to sing my song...and that process doesn't stop when you die...death is a threshold and so long as I'm singing my song then death isn't an obstacle to that.'*

According to Terror Management Theory, personal self-efficacy in a 'spiritual' sense may therefore work to assuage the human experience of terror relating to one's own death, or the 'mortal anxiety' (Greenburg *et al.* 1986).

### **3.3 Dane County Timebank**

Members of the Dane County Timebank engaged in a similar level of existential discussion during interviews as members of LETS, although less so than Lammas residents. Their existential conclusions were practical and grounded, leading to strong moral values, evident in their self-other relations.



The practical mentality of Timebank members is evident in their responses to the question: How did you become involved in the Timebank? While LETS and Lammas members tended to provide 'existential' or philosophical value-based reasons for their involvement, Timebank members expressed more practical reasons pertaining to the usefulness of membership. For example, Katie, who was first hired as Timebank staff, states that:

*'What really caught my interest about Timbanking was, I was like oh this is great, I can help people out, get them involved with their community at only the cost of helping each other.'*

In contrast to LETS members' explicit descriptions of their 'ecological-ideological' position on the place of humans on planet Earth, the simple moral precedent expressed here of 'helping others' remains implicit and unspoken. Instead, members focus the discussion on actions that they have taken. Through her practical cost-benefit analysis, Katie also promotes the sentiment that, despite its' possible moral ethos or ideological foundations, Timebank membership is appealing because it makes rational and sound economic sense.

Similarly Irene, a member on behalf of a charity called LGBT Books for Prisoners, joined personally as she saw Timebanking as a 'very neat opportunity'. For her, the Timebank is seen as a useful platform for her charity to connect with similar organisations, while providing the practical economic benefit that regular volunteers can earn Timebank hours for their time spent volunteering. These practical sentiments, rather than being part of an explicit meaning-making process, may result from the relatively younger age group in the DCTB sample, compared to that of Bristol Lets and Lammas. DCTB members are therefore at an age where they aim to be socially and economic productive, and membership within the Timebank simply allows them to further their practical social and economic interests.

However, existential thinking was explicitly conveyed by Stephanie Rearick. Being the founder and manager of the Dane County Timebank, her vision to build a multi-tiered, non-monetary, co-operative social structure, is based on existential principles. These ideals are at once pragmatic and tangible as well as being part of her vision of a sustainable society. It appears that the process of building and linking the Timebank with other co-operative structures unfolds naturally from a vision that is etched clearly into her mind, so that working towards manifesting it has become her primary goal and passion. For example, while Katie states that her ambition is, 'to be happy and to try to be a positive person in others' lives', Stephanie's response to the same question suggests that, as leader of the DCTB, she is more comfortable in articulating and expressing of her existential values, as she states:

*'My vision of the future is that this doesn't require all the thinking and the questioning, my vision is that this thing is integrated, part and parcel of the fabric of people's lives and it's not even a question, and we can't even believe it was hard to get here. Really (haha), it's ubiquitous, people are doing what they want to do because that's what comes naturally, that's what humans are wired for, and they're doing it with the support of their community, because that's what humans are wired for and that this little blip in time and space was a huge mistake and will be recognised as such.'*

The aim of 'redesigning work' so that people are 'doing what comes naturally', whilst being articulated by Stephanie, is shared by, as she states, the 'bunch of dreamers' with whom she collaborates internationally on her work. This aim was evident at a Mutual Aid Network meeting, in which the four collaborators present envisaged their bylaws to be:

*'Something profound when we're dead and gone and people are reading these things'.*

Their existential vision is all-encompassing, as it looks to a future when they are 'dead and gone' as well as taking into account 'all of time and space' and 'all of human history that's preceded us, and all of the current tools at our disposal' to come to a moral judgement about the way life on Earth naturally fits into larger universal processes.

This active cognitive process of locating themselves within the widest existential context seems to inform their moral and technical conclusions about what constitutes a just and sustainable future society (Allan and Shearer, 2012). This involves trusting and applying, not only personal experience, but a range of popular concepts within disciplines ranging from mathematics and philosophy to ecology and physics. For example, Stephanie draws on Fractal patterns, the nature of mycelium and quantum theory to inform the philosophy and design of her social model. For example, she states that:

*'We are talking about bigger sorts of natural forces and the other stuff maps onto it- for me that's even more exciting because at a concrete level it's fun to talk about but I think we're emulating the best in the business (hah) (referring to 'Nature').'*

The process of existential thinking here seems to allow an understanding of human behaviour and organisation to as she states, 'map onto', 'bigger sorts of natural forces'.

This study of biology and Fractal patterns 'repeating very similarly at different scales' influences Stephanie's views with regard to sustainability, leading her to suggest that humans have behaved like a cancerous part of the environment and that what is required is for people to, as she states:

*'Learn how to stop behaving like a cancer and start behaving like healthy cells as part of a healthy organism'.*

Actively locating herself within the processes that support life on Earth seems to allow Stephanie to as she states, 'take off the blinders' put in place within a culture that upholds our destructive economic system, to view the current organisation of civilized society as being contrary to those life-supporting natural forces. In the interview Stephanie openly and spontaneously discusses the mortality of our species. For example, in response to the question: 'you seem quite sure that this is going to work?' she states that:

*'I feel quite sure that either we're going to figure it out or we're all going to die, I mean of course individually we're all going to die but if people can't...OK so really how I feel is that if through all of human history that's preceded us and all of the current tools at our disposal, if we can't figure out NOW how to do that and stop killing ourselves and the planet then we'll just go extinct and that will be fine and that will be required because that's really stupid and ridiculous, and I just really feel like it is really straightforward, the things keeping us from doing something more sensible are ONLY, are only engrained false notions of what the world is and what the world can be, and as soon as people are able to take off the blinders and are able to understand how imaginary it is, I mean especially like the financial system and the way that we're controlled by it, and we're controlled in ways that ONLY we are doing as individuals, for example staying in a job we hate because we are afraid of financial insecurity...I get that! And I want to provide security so people don't have to do that, but I mean if people don't realise its imaginary and human made then we should go and if we do realise it then we'll do something differently.'*

Stephanie's engagement with a process of existential thinking appears to have led to her conscious acceptance of the mortal ultimatum facing our species, and a sense of urgency in working towards 'redesigning work' through the Timebank. Her daily work is therefore imbued with meaning through the life and death significance of the task at hand, as she attempts to secure the survival of our species, or what is described in a MAN meeting as 'our tribe in the future'. Similarly to the way in which LETS members practice meaningful gratitude, reciprocity and compassion within their social circle as a result of their engagement with death, Stephanie's cognitive engagement with the death of our species, and many others, seems to inspire the passion and creativity that she has for her work. Meaning is found in her identification with the whole human race, her compassion for our mortal fate, and the grand sense of purpose gleaned from this existential understanding.

Stephanie uses logical arguments, such as our potentially 'required' extinction, to express her ecological and existential viewpoint. From this ecological perspective, she considers the currently fatal economic behaviour and culture of Western society to be 'stupid and ridiculous' while expressing her logical understanding of a sharing economy as 'something more sensible'. Using this language, she frames the problem facing humanity as a matter of logical perspective, in which stepping from the old and destructive perspective into the

new one corresponds to 'taking off the blinders' to 'understand how imaginary it is.' The impression created by her inspiring words is that Stephanie has indeed been liberated from 'imaginary' constraints on her mode of reasoning, allowing her to think outside of the box to see 'the financial system and the way that we're controlled by it' as merely 'false notions'. While others are dictated to by social and cultural conventions she instead chooses to subscribe to 'existential' indicators in order to make sense of the world and her place in it.

Like Leanne at Lammas, Stephanie's connection to existential bases of thought appears to empower her sense of self-efficacy (Bandura 1997), leading her to see 'taking off the blinders' as a conscious choice that one makes when they are 'able'. Importantly, this agentic choice does not make sense within the constrained logic governing the current economic system, which renders individuals helpless in perpetuating it. This deep sense of personal agency is part and parcel of an unconstrained, ecological understanding of 'what the world is and what the world can be'. Indeed, the role of human 'agency' in averting the demise of our species is drawn upon in the conclusion to Stephanie's answer, as she states:

*'So yeah, I'm wildly optimistic and completely apocalyptic at the same time and I think whichever one we do...again it's like the quantum physics idea, whichever reality we chose to observe is the one that will be real, especially as actors in creating that reality, and especially because that bad reality that we're observing is completely human made and only by a few humans, I feel like it's really cut and dried (hahaha).'*

Stephanie's role as a social change activist and leader of the DCTB may be an important factor enabling her expression of agency in the pursuit of existential values. In her role as a leader, she is able to influence and inspire others through her discourse, empowering them to also engage in sustainable lifestyle choices, and indeed several Timebank members commented on Stephanie's positive leadership influence in the DCTB.

### **3.4 The role of Upbringing in Existential Thinking**

While only Stephanie and the Lammas residents described specific transformative moments in their lives, members from all three organisations attributed the source of their moral position to their 'upbringing'. For example, Katie explains that she has always been interested in social justice ideas because her mother was a school psychologist and her dad a nurse. She therefore considers herself to best fit within this community role. Similarly, Irene states that:

*'I was interested in social justice issues from a very early age because of my mother who made me start volunteering with different groups.'*

Karaline in LETS also attributes her existential values to her upbringing, as she states:

*'Parental values, upbringing, my parents have always been alternative, they're not hippies or anything, they're very respectable but they've always been about 'you get what you put in out of life'.*

Upbringing is found to influence actions that are deemed by members to be 'meaningful' in later life. However, some group members appear to follow the trajectory set in motion during their young lives, while others exercise their personal agency in finding meaning elsewhere. For example, Natalie became interested in social justice and the Timebank through campaigning for women's issues. She grew up in a small American town and although she states that there was 'no discussion on social justice at all' in her local town, these experiences led her to consider the existential place of women and minorities in society, which are, as she states, 'implicated with all these other ideas'. Over time she developed a passion for female empowerment, so rather than following the path laid out in her childhood her experiences appear to have inspired her to fight for the rights of minorities. These cases suggest that, depending on the individual circumstances of group members, upbringing may result in the uptake of moral values with regard to social justice and sustainable living.

#### **4. Sensory Participation in Nature**

The use of natural concepts was evident in Bristol LETS and Dane County Timebank, although these were not framed in sensory or experiential terms. Among residents of Lammas, however, 'sensory participation in nature' represents a phenomenologically distinct experience, recounted using rich and descriptive language highlighting its experiential nature. Unlike 'personal resilience', but similar to 'existential thinking', this phenomenon is concerned with aspirations beyond the self (Hartelius *et al.*, 2007). It involves exercising personal agency to carry out a meaning-making process that locates oneself in relation to the non-human world, through engaging in bodily dialogue and sensory/perceptual reciprocity with nature (Abram, 1997). This active sensory and embodied activity places the experience within the domain of 'personal agency' and is highlighted through use of the active and intersubjective verb, 'participation'.

Sensory participation in nature was introduced by Leanne during her interview, in response to the following question relating to her previous political activity: is coming here a stand for what you believe in? To which she responds:

*J: Yeah but not standing so much, I don't feel like I'm protesting because in the past I've been a campaigner, but it's not, it's BAFFLING, I'm not protesting or campaigning particularly but I'm stepping into the reality of another way of being and of living if that makes sense, and I'm not always sure (...) how pure that is or how it is moving in that direction and in a way I'm stepping into the unknown with some known, if that makes sense*

*C: Is it ideological, this thing you're stepping into?*

*J: I think it's more spiritually based, it's both spiritually based and very practical, both ends of that spectrum put together somehow, and I do have ideology because I come from the left wing of politics so I do carry within myself some ideology which I AM ALWAYS up for questioning, but I feel as if I'm not necessarily embodying that ideology but stepping into something new and taking that ideology with me as a yardstick*

Leanne describes this transformation in language that implies a full sensory and bodily experience, that is, she is physically 'moving in that direction' and 'stepping into the reality of another way', implying a distinct and embodied departure from previous ways of being and knowing. She makes a distinction between the limited experience of 'ideology', which now only serves as a 'yardstick', and the more embodied experience of 'spirituality', which is the all-encompassing 'unknown' land. She attributes this full sensory experience to her direct exposure to nature:

*'For all intents and purposes I'm farming...and anybody who works with the land might feel that but I really do feel that, which I didn't before I came here.'*

Spirituality is, by definition, considered to involve the non-physical aspects of reality, but Leanne describes her new spiritual life as being 'very practical'. The practical day-to-day tasks of living sustainably in nature, for example, spinning a fleece, propagating plants or sawing wood, are expressed as carrying within them enough spiritual significance (or meaningfulness) to induce a 'metanoia' or change of perception, in which Leanne remains in the same place physically but feels with her body and senses that she is 'somewhere new', exploring uncharted territory. Tao describes a similar transformation, stating that:

*'For a lot of the people...there is a period of kind of un-educating or re-educating or processing in some way and readjusting. There's some reconfiguring of the human being that takes place that's kind of like undoing some of society's damage through the mainstream education system and concepts about human beings, and at the same time tying human beings to the Earth because the lifestyle is so sort of close to the Earth your relationship to the universe changes. In the mainstream your relationship to the Earth is primarily a social one- you go to the shops to get your food, you go to the telly to get your information- it's all social, whereas in tipi valley it's not, it's the Earth, you go to the woods to get your fuel, you go to the well to get your water etc.'*

Through living in an ecovillage such as Tipi Valley or Lammas, the interactions that support survival on a daily basis, rather than occurring within a strictly human domain, involve

interactions with the more-than-human, and this is seen by Tao to alter perceptual and emotional experience within residents.

This sensory participation in nature involves sharpening and tuning the senses as both Leanne and Tao communicate with the living landscape through sight, sound and touch, so that instead of just 'seeing' they look, and instead of 'hearing' they listen. For example, Tao explains that:

*'It's more than care, I feel (.) INTERWOVEN with this land now, for me from my point of view, I mean dialogue with the land is a passion for me and I mean one of the things having a bit of land does is that it enables you to really dialogue with the landscape and really listen.'*

Leanne also describes how she was:

*'Just looking at the landscape and the landscape is SO BEAUTIFUL here, I might live in a caravan and sometimes have water dripping from the ceiling or whatever (giggling) but the fact that I can see this beautiful landscape, yeah so I'm seeing richness in other ways to the ways we've been told to see richness.'*

This evidence supports a phenomenological approach that prioritises bodily experience. By placing the body within a living landscape and actively engaging with it, changes in perception arguably result in a change of awareness and changes in attitude. David Abram, an eco-phenomenologist explains the experience of perceptual reciprocity with nature:

*'In the absence of technology our senses reawaken, as we reacquaint ourselves with our breathing body. Through this form of mindfulness the perceived world itself begins to shift and transform- human artefacts lose some of their distinctiveness and take on a certain character, while living entities, through their ever-shifting patterns, coax and invite our breathing body into a silent communication, a perceptual reciprocity. In contact with nature the senses are reawakened (Abram, 1997, p.63).'*

As residents' attention is directed toward the non-human living landscape, perceptions and attitudes appear to reflect this orientation, as exemplified by Leanne's newfound perception of 'richness' and Tao's emotional connection to the 'ancient sacredness' of the Priscellis and the 'care' he feels for his land. Acknowledgement of and communion with the living landscape may promote the type of care and respect that one affords to human friends and family. As Leanne physically participates within the landscape, her senses attune to its richness and beauty, which she incorporates into her life and into her caravan in the same way that Tao describes being 'interwoven' with the land. This participation is the active, rather than passive, process of exercising personal agency, where listening involves feeling, interpreting, responding and reflecting. For example, Tao states that:

*'Listening is a really important part of that (...) really trying to listen to the trees when you're planting them, really trying to listen to the battery pack, and really observing it quite closely, how is it behaving in different weather, is it behaving as well as it did last year, what are the factors.. yeah.'*

Both Leanne and Tao therefore engage in dialogue with the non-human as a learning exercise and a means of negotiating with changing natural processes for their survival. In doing so, they sensitively participate within those processes themselves, and their language reflects the ongoing and evolutionary flow of nature. For example, Leanne reflects that:

*'I'm really aware of (...) time (...) and the seasons, so it never feels static, it always feels like we're completely moving and we're part of that process, with the change, and that's the biggest thing that I've become aware of.'*

Similarly, Tao explains that his ecology is practiced:

*'In the context of a climate that is growing ever more erratic, so the TRADITIONAL approaches are becoming more and more redundant as the climate is going through these ever increasing swings of extremity'.*

As well as observing these processes, through their work, Lammas residents are embedded within them. For example, Leanne emphasises that:

*'It's totally cyclical, very vey cyclical, and I'm beginning now to put things into the cycle so January is the time when I do record keeping now, and I have to haul the vegetables...but it's a cycle on another cycle on another cycle, so it's almost like a vertical development, these are the points where I can see if I've progressed or where I've not done so well this year so, yeah I'm making plans for next year as well so THESE are the priorities.'*

This represents a departure from the experience of time as abstract and meaningless, as Leanne looks to the natural rhythms of trees and plants to determine her yearly schedule, which, she explains:

*'Means that time is really fluid (...) you know at this precise moment with this light with this day, it's this point in the year and the sap is beginning to rise in the trees and I'm already starting to prepare the seeds, it just means that time is really dynamic, which it wasn't in the same way before.'*

Through her relations with the natural world, Leanne represents herself as being meaningfully embedded within the cyclical rhythm and timescale of nature, and she is therefore able to feel and experience time in a more natural way.

Leanne's awareness and empathy with the natural processes that occur within trees and plants during the yearly cycle also allows her a more embodied experience of the seasons, and this has taught her various lessons such as how to accept challenging life circumstances



such as the long winter with optimism, as elaborated upon in the previous section. Close links are therefore evident between these phenomena, as sensory participation in nature informs residents' existential thinking, that is, the process of locating oneself within the natural world appears to support the process of locating oneself in relation to existential issues such as the significance of life and the meaning of death (Allan and Shearer, 2012). For example, Leanne highlights the experience of:

*'I suppose being really aware of myself in this landscape with lots of different things if that makes sense, lots of different connections (..) I do see more connections, but the longer you spend in nature the more aware you become, yeah.'*

Their embeddedness within the natural processes also allows Tao and Leanne to experience the changing evolutionary processes of nature within themselves, aiding existential thinking, as Tao states:

*'In terms of the structure of the land, it supports a kind of evolutionary process in me, that's really strong...it's that relationship with the Earth that has enabled me to evolve as a human being. That has been more than a facilitator but has been fundamental.'*

Deeply listening and observing nature therefore seems to support a continuous learning process within Lammas residents that enables their spiritual evolution or growth 'as a human being', through imparting lessons about meaningfulness, acceptance, growth, purpose, 'peace and love', creativity and expression. As Tao explains:

*'This is coming down to core spiritual beliefs because (..) my job is to sing my song...and for me it doesn't stop when you die at all, in a way that's another lesson of the Earth, if you keep livestock (..) is that life goes on, death is a threshold and so long as I'm singing my song then death isn't an obstacle to that.'*

Here, sensory reciprocity and understanding between Tao and his livestock has helped him to reach conclusions about the purpose of life and life after death suggesting a relationship between sensory participation in nature and existential reflection. He demonstrates that 'really listening' to his livestock and learning from them has helped him make sense of his existence, and this process of meaning-making may translate to his felt experience of life's meaningfulness, or the presence of 'meaning beyond the personal' in his daily life (Spinelli, 2005).

However, the relationship between existential thinking and sensory participation in nature is unclear, especially as 'existential' understandings among Lammas residents sometimes precede their residency at Lammas. An exception to this relationship is also highlighted by Stephanie at Dane County Timebank, who, in comparison to Lammas residents, works from

an academic point of view that is relatively divorced from the daily experience of embeddedness within nature. Nevertheless, as highlighted in section 3.3, her academic understanding of natural processes and her reflections on our fate as a species has inspired her to create a social organisation that mimics a biological structure. This aim is evident in the natural phenomena that she uses to describe DCTB processes. For example, she describes the protocol of recording transactions as,

*'Another growing pain in this process...we must occasionally cut it back to its roots when it's dead. I always hate doing that part but it always helps.'*

In contrast to Tao and Leanne, who listen and learn directly from their daily experiences with nature, Stephanie's objective, theoretical approach informs her existential understandings and empowers her to influence others through creating new forms of social organisation. As she states:

*'I always wanted to work on the bigger picture stuff like I am now, I always wanted to focus on the connection and work at a more sort of global level.'*

Stephanie's example highlights that education in philosophy and the natural sciences along with social experience may work to replicate to some degree the 'spiritual' effects of direct participation in nature. As such, she states that:

*'I have known and cared very much about it (nature) since I started working at Greenpeace when I was nineteen...but it was my education about the nuts and bolts, how all this stuff is happening.'*

Nevertheless, Stephanie describes a similar spiritual 'transformation' as that alluded to by Tao and Leanne at Lammas:

*'I didn't realise the deep psychological and emotional and I don't really like the term but I'll say it, spiritual impact of being part of the Timebank...it's been amazing just in terms of reorienting my whole perspective on value- the value of people, the value of communities, the value of stuff, it really shifted.'*

Stephanie's education and her 'enriching' experience of being 'exposed to people in really different life experiences', indicates an alternative 'social' path to 'sensory participation in nature' as a means of gaining existential or spiritual understanding. Importantly however, the existential understandings that are gleaned from personal interactions and education in quantum physics, fractals and mycelium, and their application, would depend entirely on the individual, and even these understandings are not found to provide the same embodied sense of being 'interwoven with the land' as that recounted by Tao, or the sense of deep personal understanding and respect for a living home described as 'sacred'.

Stephanie's discourse, whilst being existentially profound, may be seen to lack the direct working relationship that Lammas residents share with the more-than-human world. As such, she expresses a more objectified relationship with nature. For example, in response to the question: How would you describe your relationship to the environment, to nature?, she states that: *'I do love to be in pristine places (Haha)'* indicating a sense of distant appreciation rather than direct sensory participation and emotional involvement. However, Stephanie also later recounts an excursion to the ice caves on Lake Superior as being *'so beautiful it makes you heart ache, you know.'* Such aching is often felt in human relationships as a result of separation, which can be contrasted to Leanne's embedded experience of 'richness' in which, *'it always feels like we're completely moving and we're part of that process'*.

With regard to the influence of living in an urban environment, or separation, on sensory participation in nature, observations were also made by Tao about a trip to London, where he describes the Shard as:

*'The pinnacle of mainstream's outlook, it attempts to be divorced from the natural world around it... and you look out and as far as you can see in every direction is just roofs (.) (exhale) and so I can't help but think that yes, it (our relationship to Earth) is fundamental. If people were to open their tap in their kitchen and they had a direct relationship with where that water came from, they'd care much more about it, and if people were composting their own food waste they'd care much more about it.'*

These sentiments point to the role of sensory participation in nature, where the visual world, whether urban or rural, carries perceptual meaning that informs one's 'outlook'. As the living world engages the sensing body in reciprocal interaction, life in the city may therefore encourage a worldview that is *'divorced from the natural world'*. In cities, a lack of sensory participation with nature and its resulting placelessness may be contrasted to the strong sense of place and the 'care' practiced by Lammas residents, who experience direct, reciprocal relationships with their water, food, wood, waste and livestock. Highlighting the importance of exercising 'personal agency' to simply engage with nature, Tao believes, from his experience of living in both cities and alternative communities around the world, that,

*'Humanity is undergoing a transformation in consciousness and...our relationship to the Earth is fundamental to that kind of transformation.'*

To conclude, the role of 'sensory participation in nature' appears from these phenomenological analyses to be both crucial and controversial. It seems that the embodied and 'sensory' experience of nature afforded by ecovillage life results in

perceptual changes that lead to a change of awareness and attitude, and even a 'spiritual' transformation. However, it is unclear whether such a transformation is reliant on perceptual reciprocity with living nature- 'the fact that to touch is also to feel oneself being touched, to see is also to feel oneself seen' (Abram, 1997). Interview data suggests that some Lammas residents engaged in existential thinking and attitude formation prior to their residency at Lammas, and this may also occur in social contexts, however the experience of perceptual or 'spiritual' transformation was described by members as resulting from the physical experience of 'participation' or being 'interwoven with the land', which was unique to Lammas.

## **5. Chapter Summary**

This chapter was the first of three providing an insight into the phenomenological experience of group membership. Within this personal domain of experience, the motivation to enhance resilience was the most prevalent expression of personal agency among members. Group membership appears to satisfy members' self-interest by enhancing their personal resilience, which coincides with an ideology based on the survival of humanity as a whole, leading to beliefs and practices that may be described as 'survivalist'.

Existential thinking and sensory participation in nature locate group members in relation to that which is beyond the self, that is, to the more-than-human world, in order to find meaning. Experiences during childhood were found to contribute towards value formation among some interviewees. The embodied and sensory experience of nature afforded by ecovillage life was also found to result in perceptual changes and 'spiritual' transformation.

Clear links were evident between the three phenomena: existential thinking was found to be associated with a sense of personal agency in all three groups, and sensory participation in nature was associated with high levels of existential thinking in Lammas. The following chapter now moves on to discuss the second sphere of experience: 'group' experiences and this is followed by an analysis of cultural experiences in Chapter Nine, concluding Research Question One.

## Chapter Eight

### The Phenomenology of Group Experience: Community

#### 1. Introduction

The previous chapter explored 'personal agency', pointing to the more personal and private phenomena experienced by group members. This chapter develops the exploration of phenomenological experience by addressing the interpersonal phenomena that are experienced as part of group membership. Again, the results of data analysis are presented here that answer Research Question One:

##### *1. How do members understand their experience within the selected groups?*

'Community' is a powerful notion by which individuals organise their lives and understand their relationships. As such, it is one of the most important sources of collective identification (Jenkins, 2008, p.133). In modern society, most of us are attached to multiple communities of interest and of practice, to which we identify (Wenger, 2006; Henri and Pudenko, 2003). However, the extent to which these communities are really 'more than the sum of their parts' is debated, with scholars following Durkheim suggesting that a 'collective consciousness' indeed consists of shared moral attitudes that unify society. While some community identities are selected, others are imposed. Jenkins categorises humanness, selfhood and gender as the primary identities, while ethnicity and kinship are more dependent on external circumstances. Indeed, while some individuals identify with their community of origin, others identify with a 'community of aspiration' such as one that is escalating in socioeconomic status, or one that is value-based. In making a selection about which communities to identify with, individuals contribute to the production and reproduction of those collectivities through constructing intergroup similarities and differences (Anca, 2012).

'Community' and the negotiation of group identity has become increasingly important in the world of business, where, in a more value-driven society, employees who share and identify with an organisation's goals are found to be the 'dominant factor' influencing success and productivity (Akerlof and Kranton, 2010, p.90). The intentions of the selected groups, which may be described as 'eco-communalism', embody the ideals of simplicity,

self-sufficiency and local sustainability (Raskin et al. 2002), and this movement also draws on certain elements of 'neotribalism', envisaging a global web of economically interdependent and interconnected small local communities. Participation within these communities is meaningful to individuals because it confers social identity and permits self-evaluation through the interplay of personal and group identity: of similarity and difference (Jenkins, 2008, p.120).

These processes will be drawn upon in the following three sections of this chapter.

Phenomena occupying the 'group' domain of experience are 'community connection' and 'reciprocity within the community'. These broad themes are discussed in turn.

## **2. Community connection**

Within the group domain, the most pervasive phenomenon expressed by members was the pursuit and realization of 'community connection'. Despite the alternative economic and environmental interests of the groups, members unanimously considered this 'social' aspect to be their primary motivation for initiating and continuing membership, sometimes over many years. From a research perspective, 'community connection' can be taken-for-granted due to its fundamentality within society. In the context of this study, however, this theme begs the question: in what way do the chosen organisations provide 'community connection' over and above informal friendship groups? Is there anything specific about membership within these initiatives?

### **2.1 The importance of Vulnerable and Marginal Communities**

A common finding among LETS and the DCTB was that members include a selection of disadvantaged, vulnerable or isolated individuals, or as Karaline states, those that 'have been taken out of normal functioning'. Sometimes with minimal family networks and excluded from the 'mainstream' of society, there exists a strong emotional desire for community connection among members. For example, members of the LETS coregroup are described by Dave as being 'all there for social reasons', and Joe sees the Timebank as:

*'A good way to make connections with people...to be able to give to people who might just need to be in a social situation or they need to have food...and hopefully if they're not Timebank members we can get them involved in stuff to put them in other situations where you know, they can be in other social settings'.*

Unlike the LETS core-group, which essentially operates as an informal trading and social group, the DCTB also takes on the social service function of providing food and social support through the 'Wellness Project'. The loneliness suffered by many elderly and

excluded people in Madison is brought to light by their reliance on the DCTB Wellness Project. For example, Katie, a Timebank employee, tells the story of a woman who earns Hours by volunteering at a community supper, and then spends her Hours with a woman that serves as her phone companion. She states that:

*'They talk probably about five hours a week I would say, for sure, so yeah, it's great.'*

Although for these members the concept of a 'sharing economy' may be unknown, their participation within such an economy is motivated by the desire to overcome loneliness and to feel a sense of belonging to a network. Behaviours that are beneficial economically and environmentally are therefore conducted, not only by activists, but by those wishing to enhance their personal resilience by belonging to a like-minded community. As discussed in the next section, the reciprocal nature of the Timebank economy enables them, not only to share time, but to contribute in a variety of ways to the community. This participatory aspect is argued to confer psychological benefits over and above that of informal friendship groups.

Among marginal communities, a heightened receptivity to ideals of eco-communalism has important consequences for developing new social models. For example, at the Climate Change Convergence talk held in Madison on 23<sup>rd</sup> April, it was stated by a guest speaker that:

*'People who have less money have always had to be creative about how their needs are met, and we can learn from them.'*

Indeed within the disadvantaged Allied Drive community and in Detroit, Michigan which is a Mutual Aid Network pilot site; Stephanie states that:

*'There is not much opportunity for employment or collective wealth or anything there right now, and so the Timebank is helping to create it where it's needed, so the way I see it we create it where the need is already expressed'.*

Within the Allied Community, a strong community identity is fostered, for example, through the Welcomer's Club which introduces new residents who may be too shy to introduce themselves. These findings suggest that although vulnerable people may have a limited capacity to affect large-scale social change individually, the propensity for community connection demonstrated by these individuals is more attuned to the ideals of eco-communalism- simplicity, self-sufficiency and local sustainability, than in disconnected wealthy communities (Raskin *et al.* 2002). However, Stephanie also observes a need for Timebanking within middle class communities in the United States:

*'We have really found in our Timebank there's plenty of need for this whether you're economically well off or not, because often if you're economically well off you're strapped for time or strapped for community connection, so again this is the desire to integrate this stuff and integrate these people, and I see that desire is there in many circumstances, so we start with the people who want it and the people who need it and then we'll demonstrate that it's really fun and really rewarding and really enjoyable and then more people will jump on'.*

Indeed, being 'strapped for community connection' was expressed by a variety of Madison citizens, who stated that neighbourhood blocks are most often occupied by residents who have little contact with their neighbours. The disconnection of residential blocks means that vulnerable individuals such as Joe have no connections within their neighbourhood, and he states:

*'I don't see it (community) in my actual physical neighbourhood; I travel to be in a different area'.*

All three groups provide a central 'platform' from which to experience community connection. Rather than belonging to several social circles, social life is rather structured through events, activities and subgroups that 'spin-off' from group membership. For example, Joe's social network is formed of his yoga class, through which he heard about the Timebank, and then he states:

*'Just getting together with friends which are also part of Timebank but then we get together socially just to go out for a drink, have a conversation'.*

The type of supportive community that this platform affords is more conducive to a community experience because Joe's informal friendship group exists within a larger social structure that supports him, and to which he contributes. In fact, the importance of this network is prioritised by Karaline at LETS even over environmental concerns about emissions:

*'I would be quite happy to trade with somebody on the other side of Bristol because I have a car and I will drive'.*

The importance of this interpersonal element was not only fundamental at a member and organisational level, but also among those 'administering the system', as Stephanie highlights:

*'When people are coming from a complementary currency standpoint and administering the system they are really technical and mechanical about it but it's really the social things that are primary... A lot of this stuff isn't going to be filled by how your currency circulates or how you design your currency, it's going to be filled by how you interact with each other*



*and how deliberate we are about that and how thoughtful, and that's what I like about how Michael said in one of the bylaws to put people above any of the tools or any of the mechanics.'*

The following two sections explore in more depth members' experiences of community at Lammas ecovillage.

## **2.2 Lammas: Conflict and the Group Dynamic**

Rather than the community emerging naturally, the nine families at Lammas were selected through an interview process to become landowners at Tir y Gafl and members of the community. Four years on, community connections are developing and Kit, a father of one, admits that while there is little group cohesion, he enjoys 'individual friendships' and 'good working relationships' with certain people, thus pointing to some level of community interaction.

Differing perspectives are evident between Tao, who occupies a 'managerial' or leadership role in the group, and Leanne, who, perhaps due to her late arrival in the group and her status as the only resident living singly, expresses negative sentiments with regard to the social hierarchy in Lammas. The arrangement of independent households is described by Tao as sharing an 'ethos of freedom and acceptance', which is not considered to be suitable by Leanne, who expresses her frustration that:

*'There is no community model here, nothing, nothing at all, all we have is a management plan, that's the only thing, there's been no energy put into any sort of social agreement at all.'*

It has, Leanne states:

*'Been deliberate not to have any sort of social agenda at all, which on the one hand is very exciting because it's a blank canvas so we can do with it as we want.'*

Within the group domain, a multitude of conflicting positions and perspectives must be negotiated to find a compromise that is unique to each group. Tao and Leanne's differing situations result in their differing expectations of what it means to experience community connection. Through family life, the other residents are less isolated than Leanne, who complains that *'we've just withdrawn into our plots...they've all got families which is great for them but I withdraw to a sort of exile'*, but equally, she admits that despite craving community connection, she is 'perhaps not very sociable either'.

Her primary concern is that the social 'vacuum' at Lammas becomes filled with a regime of power rather than a democratic social arrangement. The decision to impose no social

agenda may be argued to violate Ostrom's principle of 'collective choice arrangements' for groups that manage common pool resources which states that group members should create at least some of their own rules and make decisions by consensus (Wilson, 2013). Leanne's dissatisfaction may reflect her desire to influence collective choice arrangements at Lammas and the absence of an explicit social structure may limit the feeling among members that they are collectively working towards a group goal that they have agreed upon. When collective decisions are then made, this 'vacuum' may result in the feeling among some residents that they are being 'told what to do', thereby limiting their contribution to the collective pool.

Without the institutional and legal structures of mainstream society to mediate such frictions, they must be continually negotiated as, through continually inspiring reflection and learning, they drive the evolution of the social group.

### **2.3 Lammas: Sustainability and the Nuclear Family**

The role of the nuclear family was found to influence the decision at Lammas to avoid the use of a strict social remit. Tao's prior experiences have informed this decision, and although having a family pushes him towards 'a more conventional life' he has also experienced other living arrangements, for example at Brithdir Mawr, another ecovillage in Wales, he states that:

*'Members did work days for the community and the community fed everyone, so that took away the nuclear family notion and you kind of lived together as one extended family'.*

However, with regard to this type of communal arrangement, he explains that:

*'There are things that may look socially efficient but to a degree you need to respect human nature and the boundaries of family and privacy, and that's where I found Brithdir Mawr quite difficult, and even because I've also lived in monasteries and religious communities as well, so it does create challenges in different ways'.*

The dominance of family units within Lammas creates the conditions for a more loosely defined community than is found in other ecovillages such as Tinker's Bubble in Somerset, for example, where members grow food and eat communal meals together.

A common finding among interviewees in Lammas is that the pressures of parenting limit resources that would otherwise be invested in making community connections. This sentiment is understood, not only by the parents themselves, but also by Leanne, who reasons that:

*'We're in really, really early days and there's been a lot of struggle with families here. I'm obviously not a family but everyone else is a family, bringing up children in really difficult conditions and people have really had to look after their own, so I think that's been against us rather than for us in terms of any sort of social cohesion or agreements.'*

Whether the difficulties experienced by families in their early years at Lammas may be alleviated or aggravated by a more communal model of living remains to be seen.

While this quote suggests that raising a family and achieving a low-impact lifestyle is challenging, Dan, a young father and carpenter, is motivated to build a sustainable dwelling that is centred on nurturing his family. He has extensive experience of working in ecovillages including Lammas, and aspires to build a house so that he and his young family may live sustainably. In response the question, did your views change when you had a baby? He explains that:

*'Where it comes to then for me is where exactly are we aiming to with sustainability, what's the goal of that, is it to feel better about ourselves because we're not doing as much damage to the planet or is it to make better lives for our families and our children. I think that's what it's about really...the reason we would want to keep the environment in a more placid state would be to keep people living fruitfully isn't it, cause I think when I first was interested in those ideas it was more about that spiritual thing, we can't screw up this place that we come from and stuff, but the truth is that we're changing the surface of the globe all round...We've changed it.'*

This explanation highlights the way in which family can provide an incentive to live in a healthier and more sustainable way, and indeed, those who engage with ecovillage life are commonly young aspiring parents who wish to bring their children up in a safe natural environment.

Dan's narrative also expresses the change of attitude that occurs over his life-course as he becomes a parent. The spiritual beliefs of his youth are substituted with a realisation of the way humans have 'changed' the planet, but instead of allowing this understanding to destroy is motivation for living sustainably, he has rather learnt from his experience as a father that 'the goal' of sustainability is 'to make better lives for our families and our children.' In this way, through enhancing one's personal emotional investment in the future, parenthood and sustainable living may be mutually reinforcing.

Nevertheless, negotiating the demands of family life with the high level of community connection that ecovillage life requires seems to pose a challenge that Dan, like many eco-minded parents, is reluctant to accept. In response to the question: what do you think about entering into an established ecovillage? Dan states that:

*'I think it depends on your personality...what I realised after years and years of talking about it and people almost getting on board was that the real issue was people's traction of ideas, and even groups of friends don't see eye to eye on how they want to live or how things should be done, and that led me to realise that if I'm going to do it I'm going to do it pretty much on my own and leave a space for another dwelling but that would kind of be the limits of it.'*

He therefore draws a separation between the ideal of communal living and the ideal of living and providing sustainably for one's family. Interestingly, both Tao and Dan draw a boundary when it comes to community connection. The question this poses however is whether these boundaries are indeed a product of 'human nature' or whether they too are the result of living in Western society where these boundaries exist. For Tao, the 'reconfiguring of the human being that takes place' on relocating to an ecovillage is more to do with 'tying human beings to the Earth' than learning to live communally. For Leanne, however, ecovillage life is equally about living collectively and relearning communal values that she argues have been eroded through modern life. For example, she expresses her frustration that:

*J: You see we're stuck, people tend to put individualism and collectivism in opposing camps and they can't sort of marry the two of them when in fact they're related, we have to be interdependent and it's just taking a long time for us to realise this (laughs) and you've got groups who just try and do everything as a collective and then groups who try and do everything as individuals, and it's just like, I don't understand why we keep falling over these principles when there's a relationship between the two and it can be a really healthy dynamic relationship, and one doesn't threaten the other, it doesn't have to.*

*C: Do you think it could just be a habit?*

*J: Maybe habits, and maybe past experience and I think because we've lived in a crazy society and its encouraged individualism and encouraged the rise of the family, I don't know, and we've lost a literacy and a sense of community which has been inherent and IS inherent unless we somehow forget it.*

*C: So everyone in Lamma has lived in 'normal' towns and cities before, is it hard to unlearn the rules?*

*J: Yes, unless there's a narrative that critiques it. I mean there are people around who do think about it but a lot of people are like, I do this and this is the result, that's as far as they think about it.*

Here, Leanne considers community interdependence to be part of social life, but lost in modern society. In contrast, Tao views the nuclear family model to be inherent to both human nature and society. Consequently both Tao and Leanne find that, 'group skills are learnt skills, they're not things that people inherently understand.' Leanne's concern,

however, is that Lammas does not sufficiently uphold a model of 'interdependence' which she sees to be so fundamental to the transformation of society.

Finally, the significant life experience of starting a family in modern society may, as highlighted by Dan, increase the desire for independence from a community. Referring to 'periods of friction' that 'wake us up so that we can evolve', Tao perhaps points to his own experience of re-learning how to manage the stresses and strains of community life after raising his own family.

#### **2.4 The influence of Personality and Member Demographics**

The conflict that exists within Lammas brings to light the personality and demographic factors which influence members' experiences of community connection. These include the personality, age and gender of group members, as well as their relative duration of membership. First, group members tend to represent themselves as having community-orientated personality types. For example, Karaline at LETS states that:

*'My friends do tend to be the people who like getting involved doing things, that's where I've met them.'*

Irene, a new member of the Timebank also expresses herself as having an unusually high level of sociability by stating that:

*'I do know my neighbours because when I moved to Madison I went and knocked on all of their doors and they thought I was really weird (shy laugh) but now we say hello to each other enough times that I'm happy to know them and I've had tea with some of them'.*

While not all members may see themselves equally as outgoing, those involved in the organisation of LETS are reported by Dave as being 'a bit quirky and eccentric' and highly individual in their personalities, which he says, 'suits me'. Similarly, Kit comments that political conflict occurs at Lammas because there are 'so many strong and forceful personalities in the group'. He continues to explain that,

*'You take nine individual households who are by their very definition radical in certain ways and then you get very strong characters, incredibly strong, very forceful, dynamic, charismatic (..) everyone here is charismatic but some people are VERY charismatic.'*

Leanne also agrees that at Lammas:

*'We're a group of really talented and quite intellectual people, we are quite competitive with each other so at the moment it has been a bit less about the sharing and more about it being a little bit prickly.'*

Conflict is also reported within the Bristol LETS core-group as the following conversation between Karaline and Annette shows:

*K: Nobody joins the organisational side of LETS without having some kind of a personality to have an effect and to organise, so I'm not at all amazed that we do clash but I am really pleased that we manage to get through just about, some of the clashes that have been going on*

*A: So what would you say, more to do with type A personalities*

*K: Probably, yeah, with an undercurrent of altruistic nature that hopefully gets us through the worst bits*

*A: So often that's the smoke screen though isn't it, what they really crave is power*

This excerpt points to the difference between friendship and community membership. While friendship groups are formed as connections are made between those with complementary personality types, community membership also includes the intention to be recognised socially and to 'have an effect' within a social group. According to these members, the community experience afforded by these initiatives consequently involves skills in dealing with conflicting, often 'Type A' personalities (Friedman, 1996).

The experiential difference between 'friendship' and 'community connection' is also underlined by Dan, who explains that:

*'From the (ecovillage) communities I've talked to they say it's worse with friends than just with like-minded people.'*

This indicates that negotiations within a community scenario demand different skills to those demanded by a friendship group. Within such groups, it seems that trust is fragile and is negotiated and carefully built up on a daily basis through interaction, reassurance and reciprocity, as Dan states:

*'What we're dealing with is that there's so many different personality types, so many different ways that people relate to things and deal with things and over time people change, and you're changing as well so everyone who's in this community might start on a level thing and then after three years be completely different.'*

As each individual grows and develops, their identity within the group is continuously renegotiated, giving each person a sense of, as Leanne states, 'getting nowhere in being a community'. Nevertheless, the current data suggest that having a community-orientated mind-set and an understanding and affinity for reciprocal exchange plays an important role in group membership.

The age of participants was also found to influence their experiences and motivations for participation, as noted by the more ideological perspectives of Bristol LETS members compared to the younger DCTB sample. While young members are more often motivated by skills development, middle-aged to elderly members more often highlight the benefits of receiving social support. These different motivations are highlighted by Katie, a young member of the DCTB, and Annette an older member of Bristol LETS. Katie joined the Timebank because, as she states,

*'A couple of things that I'd really like to learn to do are, I don't really know how to use the sewing machine and it's like well (.) I want to go and earn these hours gardening so that I can go out and (..) you know, even just better my OWN LIFE SKILLS (emphasis).'*

Annette, on the other hand joined in order to receive practical and social support, as she states,

*'It's just reassuring, it's so nice that somebody would WANT to do that, I mean ok I have done other things for people at LETS but it still feels quite nice to receive.'*

Nevertheless, both young and old members valued the 'heartfelt' experience of giving in exchange for the experience of belonging to and participating within a like-minded community.

Roles for both men and women were evident in all three groups and both genders expressed personal resilience, alternative cultural identities and the desire for community connection. The higher percentage of women in the LETS and DCTB sample compared to Lammas is reflected in a similar ratio of 70 percent women to 30 percent men in attendance at group events and meetings. This points to the benefits provided to women within such initiatives in terms of social support, enhancing resilience and a sense of belonging within a like-minded community, supporting a growing number of studies that highlight the role of the "Social and Solidarity Economy" in the empowerment of women (Smith *et al.*, forthcoming).

Finally, social identification among group members was found to depend to some extent on their duration of membership. Seven interviewees have participated in their chosen group for over five years with the longest duration of membership being ten years. Eight have participated for less than five years with the shortest duration being two weeks. Long-standing members tended to identify with leadership roles within the group. This includes the role of teaching others (Tao) or in Stephanie's case, working on *'the bigger picture stuff like I am now, I always wanted to focus on the connection and work at a more sort of global*

level'. When long-standing group members do not occupy a leadership position, they nevertheless tend to express their group identity as someone who is able to influence group structures and processes. For example, Karaline describes her role in influencing group affairs:

*'I tried to set up in the Bristol LETS a little bit of a tribunal thing with three people to have if any problems do arise between people, they've got someone to go and say look we want you to make a decision on this, it's not been used yet it's all in my head (...) that's my politics side coming out (...) I don't expect to impose that on anybody who joins LETS that's just my little thing.'*

Similarly, Kit identifies as one of the first people to be involved in Lammas. For example, he states that *'I was involved in the Lammas project before we found the land here.'* Despite admitting to only get along with 'more than five out of thirty five' residents, he expresses a strong identification with, and commitment to the group as whole, pointing to a well-established identity and place within the group. This is highlighted in the following statement:

*'Blatantly we're a group but there isn't a core element, we're not all Buddhists, we're not all agrarian Zen masters, we're not all something, we're just people (.) a bunch of people...and the things that we have in common are that we're all here and we all had to fight quite hard to be here, but we're all individuals (laughing) with our own particular idioms...but I can promise that if someone here needs help with anything and they ask me then I'll say yes, I won't say how, I'll say when..'*

Compared to recently joined members, long standing members tend to express identities relating to their organisational role within the group. They also express a higher level of experience and spent longer reflecting on their personal progress and development as a result of participation, as Kit states, *'since being here I know less about pigs than I did five years ago, I know more about who I am'*. However, some members also express a sense of disillusionment, as Karaline explains,

*'To be quite honest it feels like I've been on the same rollercoaster with LETS since the 90's...it feels like the SAME PROBLEMS come up over and over again...it's still just as frustrating (laughing).'*

In contrast, recently joined members expressed a more positive attitude and high level of inspiration during interviews. This was evident in Leanne's excitement at the prospect of, as she states, 'stepping into the unknown' and embarking on the 'incredible experience of arriving in a field'. Similarly Katie (DCTB) demonstrated excitement at the practical prospect of bettering her 'own life skills' while Natalie expressed the same practical and positive



attitude upon joining the DCTB as part of her charity, LGBT Books for Prisoners. She states that,

*'We can never have too many people helping out with the basement work...the more labour we have the more we can accomplish and the Timebank is a pool of labour.'*

While recently joined members focus on the benefits of networking, skills development and sustainable practices, more established members underline the importance of friendship between group members and a strong group identity in maintaining active participation over time. In contrast to the leader, facilitator or connector roles played by established members, new members tend to describe a process of cultural identification, or 'bedding in', upon entering the group. For example, Dave who recently relocated to a site adjacent to Tir-y-Gafl did so, as he states, *'thinking yeah yeah we've got a lot in common with the people'*. For Leanne this process has involved some struggle and a sense of being at the bottom of a social hierarchy, while Dave, a member of Bristol LETS for two years, is keen to establish his identity and practical role within the group through voluntary contributions. He explains that,

*'I had a social here and they said they needed a chairman and I said ok yeah. They said that they'll pay you in Ideals if you volunteer for admin roles but I never accept any. I said they should spend it on printing and venues (.) free venues (.) I think they paid the Beehive Centre near St. George's park.'*

These quotations point to a process of social identification that occurs over time as group members look to become accepted within the chosen groups. They identify with other group members as friends as well as looking to, as Annette states, 'organise and have an effect'. These findings inform the 'self-esteem hypothesis' of Social Identity Theory which assumes that individuals are intrinsically motivated to achieve positive distinctiveness and 'strive for a positive self-concept' (Haslam, 2001).

These findings suggest that within the chosen groups, self-esteem may be maintained over time through taking on practical administrative, organisational or leadership roles. The responsibility and commitment required to undertake such roles may be seen to help members to experience a sense of ownership and agency with regard to group affairs. The self-esteem or feeling of importance associated with organisational identities may also help members to incorporate the group into their sense of self (Haslam, 2001). Such an investment may arguably enhance commitment to the values and ideals promoted by the chosen initiatives, counteracting feelings of disillusionment and maintaining participation

over many years, despite the frustrating experience of, Karaline states, being *'on the same rollercoaster with LETS since the 90's'*.

These findings corroborate those of Kennedy (2011), which state that environmental commitment arises through a sense of responsibility to an 'informal neighbourhood network'. She found that peer pressure and competition within such networks encourages sustainable behaviour through the mutual expectation of morally virtuous 'green' identities between community members, and this is highlighted by Dave's comment that,

*'I read about this stuff every day (.) I do, I read blogs like The Automatic Earth and Mike Shedlock's Global Trends...and I have done for about six or seven years since the oil price went up in 2007'.*

This type of identification is discussed further in the following chapter, however these excerpts suggest that it is not only ideological values sets, but also the *systematic* or functional elements of group membership including leadership models, communication methods and external relations, that provide the grounds for competition and enhancing positive distinctiveness between group members (Melucci, 1989). Recognition of these investments in time and resources with gratitude and respect by other group members leads on to the next key theme in the group domain: reciprocity.

### **3. Reciprocity within the Community**

Reciprocity was enacted between members in all three groups, with particular relevance to the domain of 'proxy agency' (Bandura, 1991). Indeed, the exchange of goods or services in kind is argued to play an important role in community building practices and the achievement of group goals within the three organisations.

#### **3.1 Reciprocity and Tribalism**

As discussed in the previous chapter, part of the stated reason for members to engage with the selected organisations is to enact ideological sentiments regarding the condition of society and the environment. Such ideological sentiments were described by group members as pointing to a different economy of the future. For example, Stephanie aims to create a sharing economy where:

*'People re-learn...how they want to spend their time...and getting people out of destructive jobs...so combining those two things with new and old and wiser knowledge about pooling and disseminating resources, we can make it so people do the work that they're best suited to do. I like to think of it as people being put to their highest and best purpose while they're here'.*

This 'old and wiser knowledge about pooling and disseminating resources' is outlined further in Chapter Ten, but for the purposes of this section we focus on members' personal experiences of this knowledge in practice.

First, nostalgia was expressed among members of Lammas, Bristol LETS and the DCTB for a type of community connection that they no longer feel is present in modern western society, as Dan states:

*'I think extended groups of friends is the closest thing we have to community these days, maybe it has been like that for a very long time since villages have got over a certain size you didn't know everybody, your community is your extended friends and family or your network of sharing eggs and bread and stuff but it wasn't the whole village'.*

Tao also expresses a connection to the 'ancient sacredness' of the landscape, which he describes as being 'overlaid with all the modern crap' indicating a sense of anti-modernism or nostalgia for the past. He also states that he feels a 'kinship with the Celtic people that occupied this land some 2000 years ago.' The notion of 'tribalism' expressed here is broadly defined as: a 'way of being' based upon variable combinations of kinship-based organization, reciprocal exchange, manual production, oral communication, and analogical enquiry (James, 2006). Indeed several scholars have found that, due to its advantages to survival, reciprocal exchange formed the basis of tribal community, a practice that is adhered to within the selected organisations (Fromm, 1970; Lietaer, 2001).

Along this line, the Climate Change Convergence March in Madison, a protest in May 2013 coinciding with Climate Change Week in the United States, was attended by Larry Littlegeorge, a Native American Indian and Federation of United Tribes spokesperson who led a tribal dance as a show of solidarity among 'white and native' tribes in the face of climate change. This was one of many Native American 'powwows' that are held regularly in the area. Among activist and alternative communities in Madison, a kinship is felt and enacted with the tribes that occupied the land before colonisation in North America. This communion with local Native American tribes points to a sense of heritage, nostalgia and anti-modernism as expressed by Tao, but may also point to the desire for greater community connection in Madison, in the interests of both personal and social resilience, as well as environmental sustainability.



*Larry Little George leading Native American Indian dance at the Climate Change Convergence March in Madison, personal photos taken on 8th May 2013*

Effort to re-create a 'tribe experience' through reciprocal practice was equally demonstrated in the following conversation at a Bristol LETS core-team meeting:

*A: Maybe we just miss this idea of living in a village, you know where they can be part of a small community and swap things and do favours*

*K: I think that's what LETS is trying to do, it's trying to(.) it's trying to replace the community, because the community atmosphere has been whisked away by our focus on large scale business blah blah blah, and LETS is trying to replace that. It's almost like trying to give people an excuse to do the things they would have done in a small community (.) it's like trying to make it OK in the eyes of the 'I'm not being a mug doing this because I'm doing this for some money, I'm doing this for some Ideals' (sarcastic, indignant, passionate tone). That's what I think LETS is (.) it's trying to say in the eyes of the commercial world 'I'm not being a mug because I'm doing this for a profit! Look at my ideals bank balance, hey!' (laughs)*

*C: So is that not the most important part?*

*K: No, that's not what it's about, it's about the fact that REALLY you're doing it for the community(.) you're doing it for helping each other*

*C: But then does the currency make it easier?*

*K: It makes it EASIER in some way yeah*

*A: See in a small community you'd have an on-going tally in everybody's heads, you wouldn't need Ideals you know, for example, my ex, he lives in the countryside now in Somerset and he did a favour for a local farmer and then you know the farmer drove by and put a whole load of logs in his barn and that's how they work and you know they remember all that*

*C: But then the idea is to apply to society as a whole?*

*A: To a big society, yes.*

Within this excerpt is the notion that reciprocal exchange, to *'swap things and do favours'*, forms the basis of community life. In prehistoric times, this form of non-profit exchange would have contributed towards building relationships within the community as well as creating abundance through the sharing of resources within the group. The sense of unity and identity fostered by these agreements would have conferred a survival advantage when in competition with neighbouring groups (Dunbar, 2010).

Karaline suggests that capitalism erodes or *'whisks away'* the community connections that form around reciprocal, non-profit exchanges and so although the mechanical aspect of LETS is economic, it may be argued that on an experiential level LETS provides members with a means of engaging in reciprocal exchange as a form of community connection, as Karaline confirms, *'that's not what it's about, it's about the fact that really you're doing it for the community, you're doing it for helping each other'*. The phenomenological experience of this exchange is described as being *'heartfelt and 'joyful'*, bringing *'meaningfulness'* the lives of members (see page 32 and page 161 for a discussion on meaningfulness).

All three organisations aim to create platforms for reciprocal exchange to take place, and as members suggest, for community to form around those local practices as it would have done in pre-industrial society. The DCTB and Mutual Aid Networks apply reciprocal practice, common property, shared resources and other co-operative arrangements to modern living. Equally, LETS creates the social structures to support reciprocity using the internet to connect members. Finally, Lammas aims to pioneer the *'social revolution'* of relearning community practices in modern rural England by creating the physical conditions for reciprocal, *felt* interdependence to develop between residents. The social and environmental benefits of this approach are highlighted by Tao in the following:

*'In the mainstream, money takes that (reciprocity) away a lot, and every community is different, so here our car battery was flat this morning and if we were living in a suburb in Bath we would have called the AA and a van would have driven from 20 miles away with all its gear and someone would have been employed to help us with the car. A neighbour happened to be visiting (.) we happened to mention it to him and he drove up with his car 10 minutes later (.) and so socially that's a much better exchange and environmentally that's a much better solution and so those kinds of things happen a lot. There's a big kind of 'gift economy' that goes on in the background. Just wines exchanged for cheeses, for vegetables, this for that, and that has a very interesting social impact, one of which is a general feeling of abundance and wealth.'*

This exchange is successful in terms of solving the problem at hand, in terms of resource efficiency and minimising emissions through localism, as well as in solidifying a trusted

‘working relationship’ between neighbours. The ‘gift economy’ referred to here is instrumental in building trust between group members as they enter into a delayed debt-based relationship with one another. While one person is indebted to the other a trust-based relationship exists, which is then lifted when the debt is balanced, thereby contributing to the formation of relationships within the community as well as maximising the efficient use of resources (Gregory, 1982).

### 3.2 Formal and Informal Reciprocity

A common complaint among mutual credit members at Bristol LETS and the DCTB is that the online currency system employed by these groups hinders or detracts from the ‘spirit of the gift’ driving the exchange. For example, Annette expresses her preference that:

*‘I do really like it when it’s a straight swap if that’s possible, like I had all my family’s bikes serviced and I did an aromatherapy massage for each service and that was just, you know (..) the bike mechanic had a bad back and it was just like ‘this is nice and simple.’*

In both LETS and Timebank, members report often forgetting to record their hours online and sometimes only doing so, not for their own benefit but to, as Karaline states, ‘make the group look active’. Describing a recent exchange, Dave explains that,

*‘We did exchange Ideals but we just made them equal (.) ten each, so the transactions till appeared on the website as evidence of the thing working. Really we could have just done a straight swap but then we emailed each other and said, well, let’s just swap them over but there’s nothing stopping people just doing a straight swap if they know each other.’*

This conflict between formal and informal processes of exchange is highlighted by Bernard Lietaer (2001) who points to the existence of two ‘gift mechanisms’. He states that when giving somebody a gift there is a ‘counter-gift’ that is not manifested, which creates an imbalance. This acts as an investment in that the receiver will be more positively oriented towards the giver in future relations. He argues that this investment and the building of gift relationships would have been highly important in prehistoric societies where they often would have guaranteed survival during uncertain times.

In a mutual-credit system, however, the receiver is not personally indebted to the giver. Rather than being an individual process, the gift process occurs in relation to the community of individuals that use the currency: it is a collective process. Through the use of a currency or time credits, the giver is also immediately credited, so although ‘currency is created’ through a personal agreement between individuals, once the exchange takes place, the relationship no longer exists ‘officially’. Instead, a relationship is ‘symbolically’

formed between the giver and entire community of currency users or potential reciprocators. The reports from group members show a preference for the informal gift exchange or 'straight swap' over a more formal monetary exchange, as this confers the emotional experience of 'reciprocal interdependence' associated with group membership (Gregory, 1982).

WWOOFING on the other hand, or 'World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms' provides an efficient and effective means of *informal* reciprocal exchange where volunteers trade their time and labour for food and accommodation. Conducted in ecovillages and rural smallholdings around the world, WWOOFING uses no money and no virtual currency such as LETS because it is seen as a just and fair exchange. WWOOFERS volunteer at Lammas through a process of informal reciprocity with residents, as Leanne comments:

*'I've had a lot of volunteer help and then often there's plenty of hands available in those times, but I've got to think about organising materials for them, feeding them, da-da-da so it's busy.'*

Highlighting the informal reciprocal trade-off that occurs, Leanne concludes that:

*'Having volunteers here and the conversations we have and the experiences we have together is what makes it worth it, d'you know, a lot of the best things are life are free, literally, and it's those opportunities to share that make it worth it.'*

The gift exchange that occurs here of volunteer labour for food and shelter differs from a formal commodity exchange because the livelihoods of both Leanne and the WWOOFers are each at that time dependant on the exchange (Gregory, 1982). The importance of a gift economy in facilitating this type of interdependent and sentimental relationship is emphasised; a sentiment which is also expressed by Tao, who states that 'it's the simple things in life that most nourish the soul.' Chapter Ten will look at the implications of this phenomenal preference to the design of reciprocal exchange systems.

### **3.3 Reciprocity among Organisations and the Elderly**

In groups that facilitate person-to-agency and agency-to-agency exchange, organisation members confer additional obstacles. For example, in the DCTB, Katie works as a broker, matching community needs and resources. She explains some of the difficulties that she experiences in dealing with organisations:

*'They sometimes have a very specific need, it's like what if we don't have an electrical engineer that can come out and help at that exact time and that exact location?'*

Voluntary reciprocal exchanges therefore require a level of flexibility that organisations may be unable to comply with. Because individual members are more flexible in terms of their time, a two-tiered model must be carefully managed, requiring paid staff to match members' requests and offers. The values of reciprocity are key to this management, as outlined by Katie:

*'It takes the staff to really zero in and see what are the organisations, what do they need right now, how can we start cultivating that, are those resources for them or do we just go and do it, because it's that reciprocity you know.'*

Furthermore, all three groups include elderly members who are valued for their skills and contributions. For example, Katie earns Timebank Hours by helping an elderly woman who suffers from Carpal tunnel syndrome with her gardening, and she spends her Hours learning to sew from another elderly woman. This transaction is expressed by Katie as empowering the teacher by recognising her as someone knowledgeable within the community, and also provides her with a free and legitimate means of securing help without the feeling of being a burden on others.

Mike, a member of LETS also comments that elderly members 'don't like to receive gifts', perhaps due to the feelings of pride associated with high-status group identities. Therefore, instead of receiving necessary assistance as 'social care', LETS and the DCTB allow reciprocation, which promotes a more balanced form of community connection that equally benefits younger members of the community. This is true in Lammis, and in the DCTB, which takes on the role of providing essential care for the elderly and the unwell through medical transportation, neighbourhood care teams and the wellness project. Reciprocal exchange allows these services to be executed for and by the community at very little cost.

Community reciprocity is therefore argued to be indispensable to elderly or isolated community members. Through these systems they are able to gain access to a wide range of volunteers, who offer social support and assistance in overcoming the challenges of daily life, for example in gardening, collecting groceries or providing medical transportation. Within dispersed urban environments, the reciprocal nature of both LETS and Timebanking is therefore able to facilitate an experience of participation and belonging within a community, over and above the comradery offered by community interest groups and lunch clubs for the elderly. However, it should be noted that the prevalence of middle-aged to elderly group members in Bristol LETS could also be considered as a risk factor, potentially limiting the diversity of services on offer.



#### **4. Chapter Summary**

The current chapter developed this phenomenological analysis by exploring the group domain of experience. A desire for community connection was found to be the primary motivation for maintaining membership over time, particularly among vulnerable, marginal and elderly members. However, conflict was reported in all three groups, and this was particularly evident in Lammas where community-political relations influence the group dynamic. An analysis of personality and demographic factors pointed to the process of social identification that occurs over time as members look to enhance their positive distinctiveness within the groups. Through the investment of time and resources, these identity processes are argued to reinforce commitment to the values and practices promoted by these community-economic initiatives.

All three groups incorporate a system of reciprocity or gift economy (Leitaer, 2001). By creating the necessary platforms for reciprocal dependence between members, the aim of the chosen groups is for local communities to form around those practices. Because these group relations include both 'personal agency' and 'collective agency', this chapter served to link phenomena introduced in Chapter Seven and in Chapter Nine. The following chapter will conclude the phenomenology of group experience by focussing in more detail on members' cultural experiences.

## **Chapter Nine**

### **The Phenomenology of Group Experience: Cultural Experience**

#### **1. Introduction**

Chapter Seven explored the ‘personal’ sphere of experience to find that group membership enhances personal resilience. Members found meaning through existential thinking and sensory participation in nature, both of which are associated with feelings of ‘self efficacy’, contributing to their personal agency. Chapter Eight then explored the ‘group’ dimension, where a strong sense of community connection was expressed among members, centred on practices of reciprocity.

This chapter concludes Research Question One: *‘how do members understand their experience within the selected groups?’* by addressing broader cultural phenomena that are experienced as part of group membership. ‘Culture’ refers to ‘the total way of life of particular groups of people including styles, values and practices (Kohls, 1979). In this regard, members in all three groups identified themselves and their social circles as distinguishable from popular and unsustainable capitalist culture, that is, they consider themselves as ‘independent from the mainstream’.

The following four sections discuss the ways in which alternative culture is selected, constructed and reproduced; as well as how an imposed culture may be rejected. According to Bandura (1997) each of these processes exercises a differing scope and focus of personal agency. Through enacting and experiencing cultural phenomena, group members are also able to exercise coordinated effort and in this way experience ‘collective agency’ (Bandura, 2001). The role of collective agency in affecting social change is the subject of section six, followed by a chapter summary in section seven.

#### **2. Selecting Alternative Culture**

This analysis attempts to reveal the general phenomenon of ‘alternative culture’ by drawing on the selection of values, practices and styles that are shared by group members. Although culture is experienced by each interviewee in differing ways through their unique selections, the perception of a shared ‘alternative culture’ among members was found to be an important element of group cohesion. Both convergence and divergence between members’ cultural identities are therefore discussed in these sections. As Tao states:

*'On the whole there is a shared set of values, a shared ethos and yeah, a shared culture at Lammas'.*

Alternative culture is enacted by group members in a very personal way as it is inseparable from their expressions of identity and lifestyle. It seems to be very much a part of who they are: identities and lifestyles represent a culmination of the cultural selections that they have made throughout their life-course, such as where to work and live, what food to buy, how to dress and who to socialise with. These cultural selections are described by interviewees to be based on ethical beliefs, determined by socio-structural influences in their lives.

Some examples of these include Natalie's upbringing in a small American town where 'everybody looked the same' which lead to her strong beliefs about female equality, Leanne's negative workplace experiences of 'the competitive nature of one employee on another' which lead to the desire to work collectively with people, Karaline's alternative upbringing which lead her to reject the desire for material possessions and Stephanie's experience of social injustice as an employer which lead her to explore alternative economies and to set up the Dane County Timebank. Ethical beliefs resulting from these transformative moments (see page 34), are understood by interviewees to then influence and shape their selection of an alternative lifestyle and culture. For example, Leanne states that following her negative experiences of 'one employee on another' she has:

*'Always been interested in the politics of power and the environment and human rights and women's stuff, minority sexuality issues, all things that I was involved with when I lived in Scotland, the co-operative movement, I lived in a housing co-op for two and a half years and I've worked for co-ops as well.'*

This quote shows how her negative experience of working in the corporate sector may have contributed towards her long term interest in the politics of power and minority issues, which among other experiences may have led to her involvement in the 'alternative' co-operative movement. Similarly, Annette enjoys crocheting items of clothing because, as she states:

*'You can just make it yourself, enjoy it, and yeah you've got a fashionable item that is entirely geared towards you that doesn't involve exploiting kids in some sweatshop'.*

This indicates how negative experiences of consumerism may result in the formation of ethical beliefs. Based on these beliefs, group members actively 'select' alternative cultural styles, values and practices to uphold those beliefs. This crucial element of choice was elaborated upon by Hilary:

*'That choice is probably one of the most powerful things that there is, you know...we create our future through what we think, so let's look at the evidence, let's look at the world, what's fed to us (.) recognising that we're choosing the evidence that we look for and we can choose to look for different evidence, so we can chose to look for evidence of how awful everything is or of how positive and exciting everything is and if you chose that then you'll actually create a different reality.'*

The consequences of this choice are evident in the dramatic contrast in worldview and daily experience between those occupying mainstream and alternative cultural communities, as Tao comments:

*'I don't know whether there's a heightened interest in sustainability, my experience is that there's a general kind of atmosphere of resignation to the fact that we are a society in decline and are unable to do anything about it is kind of the general feeling that I get from the mainstream and people. Within the movement itself, it feels really good and really strong, attracting really good people and there's a real optimism and a real hope but we represent such a tiny, tiny part of society'.*

But how do group members make this choice? Despite the myriad of influences that vie for her attention on a daily basis, Hilary at Bristol LETS explains that she makes a conscious effort to only select and adhere to cultural stimuli that are in keeping with her positive beliefs. This process of active selection may result from members' tendency for 'existential thinking', as introduced in Chapter Seven. For example, from Karaline's ecological perspective, the endless pursuit of fashion seems ridiculous, and the accumulation of wealth and material items simply does not make sense to her, causing her to laugh. Rather she believes that:

*'Life is about learning, expressing yourself as much as you can, doing things with and for people, anything I do I want to do because of the love of doing it, not because I'm going to get paid for it.'*

Similarly, Annette's apparent rejection of mainstream fashion stems from a process of existential thinking that questions the morality of mass production in 'sweatshops'. These moral beliefs are expressed in her sentiment that:

*'Western societies are very much based on people craving what they haven't got and working towards what they haven't got rather than saying 'oh I've got something right in front of me, you know I'm going to use that' and make the most of it, being creative.'*

These ethical beliefs about environmental sustainability, personal meaning and social justice led Annette among other LETS members, to create her own clothes, which may not only be seen as an alternative cultural statement to mainstream consumerism, but also a means of expressing a more authentic self-identity.

According to Berger (1973), existential authenticity is the state of being in which one is true to oneself and then lives in accord with one's sense of one's self (Kierkegaard 1985). To be authentic one must assert their will in the choices made when confronted by multiple possibilities (Sartre 1992). This involves being attuned to one's own experiences rather than interpreting the world through institutionalized concepts and abstractions (Maslow 1968; Heidegger 1996).

From this definition of authenticity, it may be suggested that self-understanding among group members underlies their decision to create and wear unique items of clothing, thereby projecting an 'authentic self' that is in alignment with personal ethical and moral values; as opposed to projecting a 'conformist self', and thereby drawing in the shared possibilities of mainstream consumption. For example, crocheting allows Annette to express her unique creativity by making items of clothing that are, as she states, 'geared towards' her.

At a cultural level, the decision among Lammas residents to construct unique dwellings within the remote natural surroundings of West Wales, may also be an attempt to regain a sense of personal authenticity from the mainstream, to gain in self-understanding and even to experience 'the sacred'. In line with these ethical and spiritual values, Lammas residents tend to wear simple and practical outdoor wear, usually made from cotton and natural fibres. As Kit describes:

*'I'm not independent from society, I'm sitting here wearing handmade shoes and a handmade hat and ethically sourced, good quality things, or charity shop stuff but silk, you know it's all natural stuff, I'm not separate from society, I've got a buffer, so there's a buffer zone between me and it'.*

This statement shows that Kit wishes to be recognised, not as culturally independent but as a unique, authentic individual, making authentic choices and leading an authentic lifestyle, as Tao states:

*'Distinct from the mainstream and a subset of the mainstream as well.'*

Lammas, like other eco-villages, may be associated with the alternative hippie movement in the UK and Europe, and while the movement also looks to fashion as a means of expressing anti-consumerist, spiritual and tribal values, the more practical dress of eco-village residents expresses their pragmatic vision of the future, their rejection of money and even of fashion-based alternative culture in a possible quest for 'authenticity'. Their

relative isolation also removes the social pressure to over-conform to the dominant cultural styles expressed within the movement.



Tao, Hoppi and Simon from Lammas, photos sourced from [heyazine.com](http://heyazine.com), [rachel.probert.me.uk](http://rachel.probert.me.uk) and <http://one360.eu/blog/archives/928>

Children and teenagers however experience a greater need to rebel against parental values and conform to the mainstream in their cultural selections. In Lammas for example, Tao's fourteen year old son reportedly finds eco-village life frustrating. As Tao states, he:

*'Wants superfast Broadband, he wants unlimited access to electricity...his natural passion is in technology.'*

The children of Lammas are therefore encouraged to experience, what Tao calls 'the bright lights and the big city' during their youth in order to 'come full circle', returning to the land as Tao's eldest son has done. For families, choosing an alternative lifestyle is therefore, according to Tao:

*'Always a bit like swimming against the tide, particularly with children, particularly if they're in mainstream education and that influence is quite strong for example.'*

Right: Stephanie Rearick from the DCTB, photo sourced from <http://blog.timeftw.org/>



### 3. Lammas: Constructing Alternative Culture

Through their physical separation from society, the residents of Lammas express the clearest distinction of any group from, what Tao refers to as 'mainstream' culture. To live at Lammas is to partake fully in the experience, implying a level of commitment to the beliefs and practices of sustainable permaculture. Residents impart their knowledge and experience onto the large number of visitors, volunteers and researchers that regularly pass through the eco-village and in doing so they express a personal identity that is fully synonymous with 'alternative living'. Through enacting 'what sustainability really looks like', residents use their life-projects to showcase the lifestyle and culture that a positive and sustainable alternative economy might imply.

Houses and communal buildings demonstrate personal authenticity as they have been designed and built by the residents themselves with the help of volunteers. They are cob or straw bale barns and roundhouses built mostly from local natural or recycled materials. Low-impact construction is organic and low-cost, with each house costing between £5000-£14,000 to build. As Dan states:

*'I didn't want to help corporations build giant towers, I wanted something that was applicable to me and other people like me all around the world and doing it in a way that not only was cheaper but more sympathetic and more personalised to you, sort of a bespoke house.'*

Self-built houses may therefore be seen to express a sentiment of authenticity that stems from residents' ethical beliefs against corporate culture and the rising price of living.



*Interior of a dwelling in Lammas sourced from [survinat.com](http://survinat.com), and exterior of the Community Hub building, personal photograph taken on the 8<sup>th</sup> January 2014*

House design avoids the use of straight lines, allowing buildings to complement the patterns of nature, while interior designs are traditional and antimodernist, adopting natural tones and materials affording a modest level of comfort. Minimal natural furnishings are purposefully designed to maintain an ethos of voluntary simplicity that complements the natural environment, as does the lifestyle and culture that these residences support. This intention is outlined by Tao:

*'At the heart what we're doing is building an alternative culture here and the kind of ecovillage is just a framework for the culture to evolve, and the culture is an extension of the existing kind of alternative culture in the UK but it gives it a real root and real potential, yeah.'*

The ecovillage is therefore presented as a 'statement': it symbolises the alternative cultural, ethical and artistic movement of which it is a part. Within this statement is the notion of sustainability as a cultural and artistic movement of expression. This may be compared to the kind of movement that the Futurists attempted to achieve in the early 1900's. Through writing regular manifestos and practicing in every medium of art, the Futurists aimed to transform early 20th century Italian culture, liberate Italy from its past and glorify modernity. Similarly, describing the design of Lammas as a radical cultural and artistic project, Dan comments that:

*'These houses are breaking the mould in the modern era but if you look back three hundred years those were the houses most people had, now it seems a bit avant-garde but that's how it always was'.*

However, instead of glorifying modernity as the Futurists did, Lammas residents draw inspiration from permaculture and tribal heritage to 'pioneer' an alternative cultural and artistic movement. As Dan states:

*'They are taking it upon themselves something which they feel society should be looking at you know, they understand society's not going to do that, the architectural firms aren't going to do that so let's do it ourselves and I guess that could be called pioneering or just being true to what you want to get, they are very brave people.'*

#### **4. Reproducing Alternative Culture**

While styles and furnishings maintain a visual representation of the cultural ideologies expressed by interviewees, those ideologies are also kept alive by group members through continuously reproducing 'alternative media', and daily through sharing ideas and using specific vocabulary. For example, Dave at LETS states that:



*'We're developing something that is a bit more resilient and I know that's what people are talking about in the Transition Movement and I read about this stuff every day (.) I do, I read blogs like The Automatic Earth and Mike Shedlock's Global Trends and James Hansen, and all these people I read them every day and I have done for about six or seven years since the oil price went up in 2007'.*

In associating himself with these media sources, Dave positions himself within a culture that promotes 'resilience'. His repetition of 'I read this stuff every day, I do', suggests an eagerness to prove his knowledge and therefore his place in this ideological community. Climate related media not only inspires Dave's continued participation in the Green Movement, but also led to his gradual immersion within an alternative ideological community and culture:

*'I'm interested in weather and used to look at weather sites and there was a forum called weather outlook. Someone had mentioned on one of their subsections that was a bit more scientific, they'd mentioned one of the peak oil sites, that's how I'd started to hear about it and of course once you get onto one site on the web you just follow it, there's lists that direct you all over the place so I learnt a lot about economics that I didn't know before.'*

News and ideas that are circulated through alternative media sources are then discussed among group members at meetings and social events. Hilary comments that:

*'I'm just reading an article in Positive News, do you get Positive News? There's a great article in there about creating what they call a Spaceship Economy, we were thinking does LETS need to be like that; does everything that's given out need to be accounted for? And we've had big discussions about it'*

Leanne also agrees that:

*'I want to keep having dialogue with people, I'm interested in ideas as you can hear, I want to keep those ideas alive, I want to test them, I want to share them, I don't want to just sort of disappear into a routine that satisfies me and myself.'*

Group discussions create a space to exchange ideas, reaffirm alternative cultural ideologies and negotiate practical economic solutions. These conversations also allow members to belong within a meaningful cultural and ideological milieu; affirming their identity within the group by engaging in its shared sentiment (Maffesoli, 1996). As noted in Chapter Eight, grassroots networks attract individuals who have, as Annette states, 'a personality to organise, to have an effect', and Hilary, for example, expresses her identity as someone who is knowledgeable about the organisation of alternative cultural networks. In this way, the alternative network is maintained by individuals who position themselves in organisational roles as a means of belonging in the group. For example, Hilary states that:

*'The Sustainable Southville group have been co-ordinating stuff in this area for years, and then eventually Sustainable Southville and Transition merged but then Sustainable Southville seems to have disappeared too, and the Greater Bedminster Community Partnership was also there trying to coordinate everything.'*

Finally, alternative cultures are maintained through the use of particular vocabulary. For example, in discussing the future of LETS, Dave suggests, *'trying to very slowly sort of organically grow it'*, and with regard to including a food co-op, he comments that *'there's no reason why it can't run alongside and cross-pollinate'*. Tao also states that exceptions to the rule are *'part of the nature of the Universe'* and that reaping the rewards of hard work is *'a reflection of life'*. 'Green' expressions such as these, may work as identity tags to subtly reaffirm alternative moral and cultural codes through conversation, thus providing reassurance of a continued alternative culture.

## **5. The Reaction Against Mainstream Culture**

As well as being solution-focussed in everyday conversation, alternative culture is also reproduced as a *reaction against* mainstream culture, that is, group members define their culture by what it isn't and by what it critiques. In the terms used in Social Identity Theory, by categorising themselves as part of an alternative cultural group, members compare themselves to others outside of the group, and if their self-esteem is to be maintained, their group must compare favourably with other 'mainstream' groups. Therefore, as well as elevating the status of the 'in-group' to which they belong, group members may also be seen to discriminate against an 'out-group' described as 'the mainstream'. From this point of view, the decisions made by group members are justified in their interviews. For example, Tao indignantly states that:

*'For a lot of people the idea of raising their children in the mainstream is quite horrific really...for many of us here, we have gone through modern first world experience and seen through the kind of thin veneer of glamour that exists in it'.*

The decision to participate within the chosen organisations may therefore be driven just as much by alternative cultural identification, or rather by identification against 21<sup>st</sup> century Western culture, as by the personal and group motivations discussed so far. Perhaps the overriding statement of this alternative culture is a *reaction against* the money economy. Instead group members pursue a life that does not rely on the accumulation of wealth, as Leanne (Lammas) states:

*'I want to have a livelihood where I don't have to earn money'.*

Karaline (LETS) also describes her strong cultural identification against:

*'Financial service people who rang me up...and I was thinking I DON'T LIKE YOU I REALLY DON'T LIKE YOU (gritted teeth), I wrote myself out of being able to work for them because I didn't like the idea of them.'*

This cultural rejection led her to be, as she states, 'happier working as a computer programmer for the council than I would have been for Microsoft'. As demonstrated here, group culture is based equally on identification *against* the culture of Capitalism, and consequently looks to create new economic solutions. As noted in Chapter Seven, this might stem from factors such as group members' age or health concerns, leading them to redefine mainstream values and expectations about living productively in society. Equally, such a rejection of Capitalist culture may stem from negative experiences within mainstream occupations such as IT consultancy as discussed previously, or from political beliefs associated with alternative media culture.

The cultural critique offered by group members is largely focussed on media culture. For example, Tao criticises the glamour of the music videos, which he argues, 'has all had billions of research poured into them so they touch those deep human triggers'. In a passionate rejection of mainstream media, he explains that:

*'You know I don't watch much TV but occasionally when I visit my mum I see a bit and just the imagery, I mean you may have grown used to it but if you're not used to it just watching some of those Saturday early evening television shows it's just horrendous, it's absolutely horrendous (..) or just walking through town and seeing you know the pornography all over the advertising boards, it's just really full on'.*

Tao's deeply sceptical response to mainstream media is extended to a critique of mainstream news reporting, as he continues:

*'It's just unbelievable the fear-mongering and just the (.) aaaaaah I don't know why people would want to expose themselves to such bullshit I really don't. But they do, people buy them, people pay money for them and it's just fear-mongering and propaganda bullshit.'*

This emotional reaction expresses clear frustration with mainstream culture, which is later contradicted by his admittance that 'yeah sure everyone will enjoy escaping into some Hollywood film now and again.' He also admits that:

*'Like any other family...if there was a Chinese takeaway down the road we would probably use it but the closest equivalent for us, our convenience food if you like is the food in the garden.'*

In specifying that in this way Lammas culture is both 'distinct from' and a 'subset of' the mainstream, Tao indicates that he also understands and to some extent shares the desire

for convenience and escapism that is characteristic of mainstream culture. This in turn adds credibility to his strong negative attribution towards mainstream media, which may then be seen as an attribute of the media itself, rather than of Tao's specific point of view.

This attitude towards mainstream news is also shared by Hilary as she explains:

*'I don't ever interact with the news after about 6 o'clock because I don't find it particularly helpful to my sleep. I do keep up with the news but I keep a filter on I suppose, I'm aware that it's things people are choosing to give me, but things like Positive News is a very different kind of news.'*

Described as 'the world's first solution-focused newspaper', Positive News naturally holds more practical relevance to those implementing community initiatives or innovative solutions for sustainability. However, this selection also reflects Hilary's cynicism towards mainstream news reporting, evident in that she considers it to have a negative bias that is disruptive to her sleep.

However, rather than just criticising mainstream Capitalist culture, interviewees also provide triumphant accounts of the alternatives that they choose in maintaining their resilience, as discussed in Chapter Seven. For example, following his description of mainstream media as 'horrendous', 'pornographic', 'fear-mongering and propaganda bullshit', to which he would not expose his children, Tao then describes how:

*'Right now my daughter's out there, with a whole bunch of neighbours' friends around and she's out there and I don't have to worry about strangers turning up or cars or anything like that, so it's a completely secure environment for them, and an environment that's just full of nature and space and clean air.'*

Indeed, protecting children from what they perceive as the harmful and even dangerous effects of mainstream culture did play a part in several families' reasons for relocating to Lammas. Furthermore, Tao's statement that 'you may have grown used to it but if you're not used to it just watching some of those Saturday early evening television shows it's just horrendous' may also place value on his observation of mainstream culture from an external or 'sensitized' perspective (Freedman, 2003).

As outlined in Chapter Seven, the decision to remove themselves from mainstream culture is expressed by group members as being based on the desire for autonomy, personal resilience and existential meaning. Tao is now able to achieve these goals through his participation in nature, which he describes as:

*'Being able to appreciate the birds and the flowers and the mice and the bumblebees, being able to appreciate the first blueberries of the season, or good company and good fire, the*

*simple things really cause that's what REALLY nourishes our soul, yeah sure everyone will enjoy escaping into some Hollywood film now and again but actually clean water to drink, good wholesome food and a natural environment and wahey.'*

The perceived comforts, pleasures and excitement of mainstream culture may be too tempting for many to leave behind, however members of all three groups can evidently, as Tao states, 'see through the thin veneer of glamour that exists within it', but what does this understanding entail? Tao continues to explain that:

*'For me the evolution is like a spiral in a way, as a society we've come from a kind of land based subsistence and we've gone and seen through the industrial and technological revolution and are coming full circle to recognising that actually there is real value in clean air, good water, and food that nourishes you and a kind of environment that feeds your soul'.*

As mainstream consumer culture offers distractions that tap into those deep human triggers for survival, which he states as being 'fear and sex', these are acknowledged by group members as failing to support a more balanced, wholesome and soulful existence, and what group members seek, therefore, is a way of life that is described as nourishing to the 'soul'. However, identification against mainstream culture is difficult to continuously maintain because mainstream cultural stimuli, as noted by Tao, are designed so that they tap into desires that we all share, such as the desire to survive. The exaggeration and glamorisation of these desires in mainstream media is seen by Tao as being the result of *'billions of research poured into them so they touch those deep human triggers'*. Arguably because of this, although the 'veneer of glamour' is lifted, the temptations of mainstream culture still remain among group members.

This conflict is evident in Tao's discourse, as noted above, highlighting the importance of alternative media, regular sensory participation in nature, and involvement within a network of people who inspire each other in order to sustain ethical and sustainable behaviour. Lammas residents' physical separation also acts as a natural barrier against mainstream culture, while members of Bristol LETS and the DCTB, who live in urban locations, must be more active in selecting their cultural influences on a daily basis. In line with Social Practice Theory, these extracts highlight the phenomenological importance of *place* and socio-structural context, not only in selecting, but also in maintaining a rejection of cultural influences (Wenger, 2006).

## 6. Culture and social change in the UK and USA

Social Cognitive Theory extends the conception of human agency to include 'collective agency', that is, peoples' shared belief in their collective power to produce social change (Bandura, 1997). By identifying with an alternative culture that rejects imposed belief systems, group members work to create social change on a cultural level. The experience of 'collective agency' through reproducing alternative cultural networks was most prominent in Lammas and the DCTB, but less so in Bristol LETS. Key cultural differences were also observed between Bristol LETS and the DCTB in their perceived collective agency.

At a Timebank Transportation Builders Workshop held at a public meeting room in Madison (23/04/2014), collective agency was evident among the thirteen Timebank members present. During a brainstorming session led by Stephanie, community transport needs and the community resources to meet them were identified. 'Needs' included medical transportation, rides for errands, mechanic services, rural transportation, overcoming social isolation and after-hours transport. In order to meet these needs, the following community resources were identified during the meeting and recorded in field-notes:

### Resources:

- Carpooling, ride-sharing
- The 'Community Car' group, community van
- Bus chartering to events (like the Sierra club)
- Bikes, pedi-cabs, walking errands: 'planting that notion that I don't need a car, I can help someone on my bike explodes it'
- MATC Mechanics will fix parts for free
- Community centres and churches have vans, people and insurance- it will be possible to strike a deal with these groups.
- Elderly bowling and golf groups will also be receptive, VFW, American Legion: members of these groups might also have needs that can be fulfilled by the TB. This type of association will limit the stigma of needing a ride.
- A solution would be a grocery delivery run (working towards this in Allied)
- Unused b-cycles with baskets (can be used for grocery delivery), segways, scooters
- Employers, employer incentives to take part in the scheme
- Reaching out to current timebank members
- Press attention
- A 'mechanism' to connect, apps, maps, a board to post advertisements
- Ways to address people's barriers (fear, shared liability....)



*Stephanie leading the Transportation Builders Workshop, personal photo taken on the 9<sup>th</sup> May 2013*

The solution suggested by group members to ‘strike a deal with ‘community centres and churches’ points to the way links may be made with groups based on a shared moral vision, and through such partnerships it was suggested that community resources may be pooled and better disseminated to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. Such solutions point to ways that the Timebank looks to work *with* systems that are currently in place to fill in gaps and create positive, pragmatic action within local communities. The high level of perceived collective agency observed here and in Madison generally, was found to be tied in with an empowerment of the disadvantaged and the fight for social justice. For example, one of the ten regular volunteer medical drivers working through the Timebank commented that, *‘I have learned an enormous amount about the challenges people face that I didn’t know about’*.

The high level of crime, widespread poverty and the lack of state welfare provision in the United States may also contribute towards the personal struggles reported by several interviewees. These socio-structural influences, combined with a highly individualistic culture as well as strong leadership from Stephanie, paradoxically works to support a strong and progressive movement for social change compared to that seen in Bristol LETS. Members of the DCTB strongly express both personal and collective agency, particularly in the context of a politically liberal city such as Madison. Within this context, Stephanie sees her role as a leader as being to alleviate some of the economic struggles faced by DCTB members, as she highlights:

*‘It’s different in every country but in this country the economy abandoned a lot of people from the beginning and they have never, I mean never had a healthy relationship and so the necessity is there...we got it bad in a lot of places around this country, and you do too I know.’*

This progressive movement for change was also evident at the well-attended Climate Change Convergence Talk held on the 23 April 2014 in Madison, where one panel member commented that *'complementary currencies don't apply to how we're already living but change the way we live.'* In challenging the money system another panel member exclaimed that, *'money gives permission- we don't need this!'* Attendees provided evidence of a growing cooperative movement in which co-ops are beginning to invest in each other, food co-ops and credit union schemes are becoming incorporated, housing co-ops are buying and renting properties to local businesses, and community land trusts are buying land in Wisconsin. Reports from panel members indicated that the Cooperative Movement in America is creating an alternative infrastructure for the common purpose of shifting a structural dynamic. As Stephanie stated from the panel:

*'We will organise ourselves around our values, human technology is there, we don't need to wait for technology to catch up to us.'*

This high level of collective agency may be compared to the relative helplessness expressed by LETS members as noted in Chapter Seven. It may be argued that socio-structural influences, while supporting collective agency in America, might work against such feelings in the UK. For example, a long history of welfare provision may limit the necessity for more disadvantaged individuals to partake within sustainable community initiatives. Participation in LETS was seen to be less essential to the economic survival of any member and for some members, particularly those in urban areas, it may satisfy only the necessity for emotional connection and ideological sentiments regarding sustainability (see pages 181 and 146 respectively). However, LETS is described as being more successful in rural areas due to the greater necessity for such a model of exchange, and similarly, the *necessity* of Timebanking in America may contribute to the relative success of the movement there. As mentioned in Chapter Eight, LETS members predict that in the future, an increase in the value and necessity of LETS will follow a potential economic downturn.

This evidence suggests that, in the UK at least, social change may come about in earnest when it is felt and experienced by group members as being 'necessary'. The felt necessity of the DCTB among members might also contribute towards the strong leadership style expressed by Stephanie. Terror Management Theory suggests that when a follower's mortality is made prominent they will tend to show a strong preference for iconic leaders, explaining why a leader's popularity can grow substantially during times of crisis (Cohen *et al.*, 2004). For example, one resident of the deprived Allied Drive neighbourhood of Madison points to the felt necessity of the DCTB and Stephanie's leadership by stating that:



*'I want the Co-op. The Co-op must happen! If I must be on the core group then I will. I'll do what it takes to make the Co-op happen.'*

In Social Cognitive Theory, research also shows that people achieve the greatest personal efficacy and productivity when their psychological orientation is congruent with the structure of the social system. Culturally, that is, people from individualistic cultures feel most efficacious and perform best under an individually oriented system, whereas those from collectivist cultures are most efficacious under a group-oriented system (Matsui and Onglatco, 1991). Members of Bristol LETS may experience incongruence between their desire for social change and national systems of provision, while the American sample, on the other hand, arguably demonstrate the motivating effects of 'necessity' and strong leadership on individuals' collective desire to produce social change (Bandura, 1997). These cross-cultural findings tentatively point to a connection between the socio-economic conditions experienced by group members and their differing motivations and experiences of participation within social change organisations.

## **7. Chapter Summary**

This chapter concludes Research Question One by addressing the cultural phenomena that are experienced as part of group membership. First, this analysis revealed how group members actively select authentic identities based on existential and ethical beliefs, despite the pervasiveness of 'mainstream' or mass consumer culture. Alternative culture is also constructed in Lammas, where residents experiment with styles and furnishings that maintain a visual representation of alternative cultural ideologies. These are also maintained by sharing ideas, alternative media and the use of specific vocabulary; all of which work as means of identity positioning. Finally, members' engagement with alternative culture demonstrates their identification against the mainstream, that is, the mainstream media, news channels, tabloids and the capitalist economy. Group membership and the physical socio-structural context of the groups are argued to maintain a rejection of these cultural influences (Wenger, 2006). Finally, culture was found to impact upon the perceived necessity for social change among both the British and American participants, pointing to the impact of political and economic conditions on the experience of 'collective agency' (Bandura, 1997). The following chapter moves away from the perspective of individual group members, taking a group-level perspective (informed by members' experiences as well as secondary data sources) in order to evaluate the groups' structures and processes as they look to create social change from the grassroots.

## Chapter Ten

### Group Structures and Processes

#### 1. Introduction

The previous three chapters explored the phenomenology of group members' experiences. The following two chapters now move on from members' individual experiences to present a more contextual analysis focusing on the organisations and their wider social movements. This is in answer to Research Question Two:

*What processes lead to the formation, maintenance and contraction of these initiatives?*

From their deeply embedded positions, group members experiment daily, solving problems in an ad-hoc fashion and negotiating the challenges that slowly drive the trajectory of their movements. The aim of this and the following chapter is therefore to provide a hermeneutic analysis of both the interview transcripts and secondary data sources, 'stepping inside' the selected organisations in order to suggest directions for future organisational developments. This implies a change of perspective from that of the previous three chapters. Rather than analysing the experiences of group members, these chapters offer an analysis of the groups themselves, drawing on group members' experiences as a resource to inform this analysis of the selected initiatives. These analyses account for the primary role of daily interactions between individuals in social systems, and how these constantly generate unpredictable meaning 'on the ground' (Lewis and Greenham, 2014). In acknowledging these first-hand experiences, this chapter presents a bottom-up analysis, incorporating differing objectives and expectations to those that stem from a prescriptive top-down model or 'management plan' for social change.

The following sections therefore draw on the experiential evidence provided by group members as well as secondary data sources to document the relative successes and failures of group processes and structures. These indicators position each organisation within the sustainability movement, as well as within the wider socio-political regime. The perspective taken here cannot therefore be simply 'neutral' or 'objective', but aims to pragmatically take into account the objectives of the organisations themselves in order to broaden the knowledge base informing academic scholars and practitioners maintaining these grassroots sustainability initiatives. The following sections will evaluate the structures and processes of each group in turn before a comparative analysis is presented in section five.

This is followed by a discussion of the approach taken to answer Research Question Two in light of the findings in section six, and a chapter summary.

## 2. Bristol LETS

This section aims to briefly evaluate the concept and organisational structure of LETS in terms of its strengths and limitations. In particular, it considers factors relating to the *contraction* of this initiative. As noted in Chapter Four, despite its status as a pioneering community-economic initiative, LETS has had greater success in its social impact than in its economic impact, and indeed, members of Bristol LETS reported community connection with 'like-minded people' to be the major reason for their participation. Along these lines, the division of Bristol LETS into local 'core-groups' has led to the development of defined communities of friends who trade primarily between each other, as Karaline observes:

*'As you can see from this meeting, Southville LETS has been very strong and it still is very strong, we all know each other and we all keep saying 'we must branch out and get in touch with people outside the area' which is really hard to do.'*

Annette also exclaims that, 'we're so parochial!' indicating that although members are aware of the need to branch out, the organisational structure of Bristol LETS prevents this.

The potential of Bristol LETS to promote community building may also be compromised by the simple structure of its online platform which facilitates person-to-person trading only, as shown below.



Screen shot of the Bristol LETS online trading platform, sourced from <http://www.bristollets.org.uk/>

These indications corroborate Seyfang's (1997) suggestion that, despite the marginal economic and environmental impact of LETS in the UK, there is stronger evidence of social impacts among groups.

In comparison to more complex second generation initiatives such as Spice Time Credits in Cardiff, the online LETS system may be seen as being less innovative as it does not provide space for community projects as well as one-to-one trading on its platform. Indeed, Dave's attempts to organise a LETS community allotment and 'veg swap' event failed to materialise without an official 'allotment project' within the Bristol LETS initiative.

Rather than attracting a broad membership base, the Bristol LETS core-group is also focussed on maintaining regular membership and minimal public engagement is conducted, as Dave, the chairman, states:

*'There hasn't been anything terribly organised in terms of recruitment.'*

Instead, he is 'prepared to wait' for membership numbers to rise. Indeed, Karaline and Annette also express a sense of frustration and disillusionment while reminiscing about how they have been, as Karaline states, *'on a rollercoaster with LETS since the 90's.'* LETSLink UK, the central organisational body of LETS in the UK also indicates in the latest news update (Oct 2012) that, *'yes, we have neglected outreach'*. The update also states that:

*'We continue to prioritise supporting groups who affiliate to LETSlink and follow the community based model of Local Exchange Trading, which remains the most sophisticated concept...but as we have been overwhelmed with new requests for support, we are now working on changing the way we respond.'*

LETSLink's focus on protectionism and continuation may be appealing to an elderly demographic; however this contradicts the rapid changes occurring within the complementary currencies movement of which it is a part, where an impetus for social change is being driven by an increasing number of professionals looking to promote the latest ideas and technology within this rapidly developing niche. The approach taken by LETSlink is to support only LETS-affiliated groups, rejecting 'requests for support' as suggested above, while 'second generation' community currency models such as Spice Time Credits and Mutual Aid Networks aim to maximise collaboration and co-production between projects and organisations of all kinds.

For example 'Timeplace', a Spice project in Cardiff, is hosted by Action Caerau Ely (ACE), another community development group. Spice and ACE have worked together for two

years to form an umbrella that manages 800 individuals and 75 organisation members who trade between each other in time credits. Collaboration between a large range of service providers creates a diverse 'spend network', which is appealing to individual members who can then volunteer and spend their time credits on a wide range of activities, events and services. Similarly, the Bristol Pound is managed through the Bristol Credit Union and works in collaboration with The Real Economy, another co-operative enterprise that establishes buying groups, pop-up markets and develops local food supply chains using the Bristol Pound. Social change projects are therefore co-produced by a diverse network of actors, and this characterises second generation models from first generation Local Exchange Schemes.

Within Bristol LETS, the social needs of an elderly core-team further shape its priorities as an organisation. Among these members, the motivation to engage with LETS is not to 'engage the many' or to affect immediate social change towards economic or environmental goals, but rather to provide a space for individuals to experience community and enact ideological values based on economic sustainability. Indeed this pattern is evident, not only in Bristol LETS but also more centrally at LETSLink UK, and these factors may have led to a contraction in LETS participation as more innovative second generation initiatives emerge. However, LETS continues to remain functionally distinct from social service providers such as Spice Time Credits and as such, continues to remain a small but important niche within the alternative economy of Britain.

### **3. Dane County Timebank**

This section evaluates the strengths and limitations of the Dane County Timebank. In particular, it considers factors relating to the *initiation* and *maintenance* of this initiative. These factors are outlined in turn.

#### **3.1 Initiation of the DCTB**

The Dane County Timebank stems from two initiatives already in existence in Madison: Mother Fools Coffee Shop and Madison Hours Cooperative. This is in line with guidelines provided by the Timebank Knowledge Commons<sup>4</sup> which state that:

*'Building a Timebank into another Timebank's already created and running structure can be a great help with getting started.'*

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<sup>4</sup> <http://community-currency.info/>

These findings suggest that, as well as 'building upon another Timebank's already created and running structure' integration with other like enterprises such as alternative currencies, sustainability groups or community organisations may be an equally viable route into setting up a local Timebank.

A second factor in the initiation of the DCTB is entrepreneurial experience. Indeed, lack of experience in business management may pose too great an obstacle to those with the motivation to launch such an initiative but without the confidence to do so. The DCTB publishes materials for those wishing to start a Timebank, and the Timebank Knowledge Commons also provides peer mentoring and training by experienced Timebankers. Stephanie's experience suggests that in the absence of consultation and training in Timebank development, business management courses or prior experience in running a small business also provides the skills and confidence necessary to start a Timebank.

In the initial phase of setting up a Timebank, seeking out and selecting a dynamic combination of people to run the Steering Team is also suggested. Guidelines published by the DCTB suggest consultations with human service providers, neighbourhood leaders, people with relevant needs and skills, local businesses, local food producers and community organisations. This wide representation of local organisations is argued to create an appealing 'spend network' where Timebank members can engage to both earn and spend their hours. Stephanie Rearick also suggests that a Steering Team should be selected to include the following skills set:

1. Public speaking
2. Creation of outreach materials
3. Understanding of press releases
4. Welcoming, patient people-oriented person
5. Fundraising
6. Community organizing
7. Nuts and bolts organizing - space, time, materials

Similarly Mary Fee of LETSLink UK, states the importance of selecting committee members in the early stages that have personality types to most appropriately fill certain roles (see Chapter Eight). She warns that groups often dissolve due to an uneven balance of personalities, or conversely because committee members get on too well, leading the group to become too informal, lacking formal structures and exchanges. The board of nine

directors that manage the DCTB was selected to offer a range of skills including event management, organisational training, charity and care work, running workshops and political involvement as well as being long-standing residents of Madison. This may be compared to the core-team at Bristol LETS, which represents a self-selected friendship group and as a result is more informal and less skills-oriented. This highlights the role of skills selection in the initiation and maintenance of community-economic initiatives.

### **3.2 Maintenance of the DCTB**

The DCTB is managed by a Board of Directors, which consists of between 9 and 20 representatives elected every January, and who meet six times per year. All decisions facing the Board are settled by a 'quorum' or 51 percent of Board members. Although the Board strives for consensus decision-making, decisions may be decided by only 80 percent of the members of the quorum (Bylaws, section 1b).

The projects and activities of the DCTB are determined through a bottom-up process. For example, during the Allied Co-op Energy Project meeting (24<sup>th</sup> April 2014), plans were initiated to hold a 'Block Party' on Allied Drive, including food and games for the children. This suggestion came in response to high demand within the community for such an event. Stephanie also explains that this bottom-up interpersonal engagement is not only fundamental at a community level, but also among those 'administering the system'. She states that:

*'When people are coming from a complementary currency standpoint and administering the system they are really technical and mechanical about it but it's really the social things that are primary...a lot of this stuff isn't going to be filled by how your currency circulates or how you design your currency, it's going to be filled by how you interact with each other and how deliberate we are about that and how thoughtful...to put people above any of the tools or any of the mechanics.'*

Stephanie's day-to-day role as the director of the DCTB is not therefore to administer the system from 'above', but to engage with the various communities and projects on the ground in order to determine and respond to their requirements. This first-hand experience, not only allows her to manage the DCTB appropriately and successfully, but also results in, as she states:

*'A deep psychological and emotional and I don't really like the term but I'll say it, spiritual impact...it's been amazing just in terms of reorienting my whole perspective on value- the value of people, the value of communities, the value of stuff...its exposed me to people in really different experiences than I'd ever been exposed to before...it's amazingly enriching in that way, and that's why I'm such a zealot about it, it's just the experiential learning which*

*I've experienced myself and just seeing the power of it. I want to create a lot of entry ways for people to get that from their own motivation, what they actually want to do'.*

Stephanie's engagement with 'people in really different life experiences', including employees of her own Mother Fool's Coffee Shop suffering low wages, is shown above to create a negative personal experience which drove her to pursue the DCTB more deeply. Personal engagement with community members suffering social injustice may therefore be an important factor informing managers' existential understandings and driving both the initiation and successful bottom-up management of community-economic initiatives.

Second, the network structure of the DCTB enables 'co-production' to take place between DCTB organisers and members. According to the New Economics Foundation, co-production means:

*'Delivering public services in an equal and reciprocal relationship between professionals, people using services, their families and their neighbours' (NEF, 2008)*

As mentioned in Chapter Three, Ostrom (2010) criticises modern economic theory, which takes a top-down view, for distorting some important economic and political issues. From the first-hand experiences of group leaders such as Stephanie, it is evident that co-production is able to reverse this top-down view, bridging the gap in understanding between those living in recipient communities and those administering alternative economic models.

These findings suggest that 'co-producing' rather than 'managing', promotes a change in perception which results in successful leadership for sustainability. Stephanie points to the 'deep psychological, emotional and spiritual' impact that practicing co-production has had on her personal experience, and how this 'experiential learning' has worked to 'reorient' her 'whole perspective on value'. At the Spice Time Credits Conference (November 2014), middle management in the social services was described 'permafrost' with regard to effecting social change. The current findings indicate that co-production at this management level has positive psychological effects as it enables experiential learning and direct personal experience to occur which stimulates empathy, perceptual transformation, and a renewed interest in social justice among leaders.

From a member's point of view, the integration of various projects within the overall Timebank structure provides a central platform from which to experience community connection. Like Bristol LETS, the DCTB is also a platform for organising social events around food, music, talks and activities and as argued in Chapter Eight, the type of



supportive community that this platform affords, is argued to be more conducive to a community experience than isolated and informal friendship groups. This 'social' aspect is also important in, as Stephanie states:

*'Allowing the citizen realm to step up because people often get into trouble because of their social connections and problems in their community being unhealthy, and visiting the emergency room because they're depressed and lonely, have to do with their social connections and their community health, and so the Timebank is a platform for the community to make itself known and available for these things'.*

By 'allowing the citizen realm to step up' the platform structure of the DCTB enable personal and collective agency by providing a layer of democracy. The Timebank Youth Court, for example, provides proxy agency to individuals by connecting and monitoring fragmented residential communities, allowing individuals within those communities to have a voice and support each other. Through the use of time credits this structure is reported to be effective in combating social problems in an economically efficient and more sustainable manner.

Finally, interview data suggests that the DCTB acts as a 'platform' that connects individuals and organisations in Madison as it incorporates person-to-agency exchanges. For example, LGBT Books for Prisoners, a recent member organisation, aims to benefit from the DCTB 'platform', as Natalie states:

*'The Timebank has almost 200 organisations and so it seems to be a good place to connect with other organisations that may or may not be doing similar work with whom we might collaborate.'*

This system has a positive knock-on effect within the wider sharing economy by encouraging person-to-agency volunteering and enabling a more organised level of community connection to occur.

However, the applied model of person-to-agency Timebanking in the DCTB involves certain obstacles. First, organisations such as LGBT Books for Prisoners are unable to earn Timebank hours themselves because their small charity is volunteer-run and stretched on time and resources. They therefore joined the Timebank for the benefits they might receive: to incentivise their volunteer labour and to 'make themselves known' to a wider community of volunteers and donors. They state that 'although we do not intend to offer things as well', they understand that:

*'It is not uncommon for organisations to be in the red so to speak in terms of hours and that's ok as long as they know that we're making an honest effort to give back to the community.'*

A time-based economy differs from a money economy in that, in order for some members to be 'in the black' others must be 'in the red', and so it is acceptable to be in 'debt' of time. However, a common risk among person-to-agency Timebanks is that organisations' tendency towards unbalanced receiving is in conflict with a more balanced co-operative culture based on reciprocity. The danger of including businesses without regulating their transactions is that if too many members become excessively in time 'debt', fluidity within the mutual-credit system reduces and the mechanism of exchange freezes up. As noted in Chapter Three, the gradual assimilation of a 'debt-based' economic culture may also threaten the ethical structure of the Timebank.

In the DCTB, organisations' inability to contribute time is overcome by a policy stating that employees can donate their earned hours to their organisation in order to increase its 'bank' balance. LGBT volunteers therefore also expect that, as Natalie states:

*'People in Madison who...care about causes can donate their hours to us'.*

The flexibility of this policy prioritises community connection, and from an organisational point of view, Natalie's impression of the Timebank is that:

*'It seems for organisations to participate, the idea behind it is more explicitly community building than keeping track of how many hours people are giving and receiving'*

This flexible structure is most accessible to new member organisations, providing, as Stephanie states, 'a bridge allowing people to cross over'. In order to operate successfully, a business ethic is therefore cultivated by Timebank brokers such as Katie who accommodate for the more specific needs of organisations, as she describes, they often require *'somebody who can come out at exactly that time.'* Organisation members are required to be more flexible in dealing with volunteers and this constant negotiation results in the formation of new rules and regulations that develop the organisation.

The inclusion of organisation members within an overarching Timebank structure places the DCTB within a type of governance role, as Ostrom's eighth principle for groups managing common pool resources states, *'for groups that are part of larger social systems, there must be appropriate coordination among relevant groups'* (Cox, 2010). According to Ostrom's theory of polycentric governance, every sphere of activity should be governed at an optimal scale, with large scale governance requiring coordination of activities. This

involves negotiating the clearly defined boundaries of specific organisation members within the broader boundary delineating Timebank membership from non-membership through specific rules and regulations.

Within the DCTB, trust and reciprocity may be maintained in person-agency trading through regulations that ensure *'proportional equivalence between benefits and costs'* (Principle Two, Cox, 2010, p.4-5). For example, by stating that a certain amount of flexibility is mandatory in transactions, or by limiting the amount that organisations and individuals are able to 'go into the red'. However, as noted in Chapter Eight, introducing too many social control mechanisms is found to limit the experience of informal reciprocity and reduce member engagement. It is therefore suggested that currency designers do not rely only on Ostrom's Principles, as these focus primarily on social control mechanisms such as recording, measuring, rewarding and cost-effective monitoring, but also develop additional bottom-up mechanisms to build bonds of trust and a community identity. These regulatory challenges must be met by paid Timebank brokers as well as those designing the system.

#### **4. Lammas Ecovillage**

This section discusses the unique development of Lammas Ecovillage. Its development is based partly on the unique individuals that form the community and, like the DCTB, partly on the visions and intentions from which it was founded, highlighting the role of its founder, Tao Wimbush, in shaping the community. Tao's role is discussed by Kit:

*'Tao is an incredibly forceful and dynamic and charismatic person and what that means is that he did an awful lot of work and shaped things the way that he wanted to even though I was involved at those early stages it's not necessarily shaped (.) it's not a Gestalt entity.'*

After living in monasteries and other religious communities as well as more structured intentional communities such as Brithdir Mauw, where 'members did work days for the community and the community fed everyone', Tao states that:

*'The Lammas project was a way that I could take what I had learned from the different communities and put together a kind of structure that I thought would take the best pieces from the different communities and blend them together in such a way that provided a viable and accessible route for ordinary people to get out of the mainstream and into the alternative world.'*

A major inspiration for Lammas was Tao's five year experience of living at Teepee Valley, another ecovillage in West Wales, which he describes as:

*'A culture based on love and peace, it's as simple as that, peace and love, and it was a very creative place, a very inspiring place and it makes no demands on people who live there.'*

*You can go and live there and be a total hermit for years on end, you can participate in the society there or not, and it's completely accepting of people WHERE THEY'RE AT.'*

Tao's preference for the freedom he experienced at Teepee Valley, as expressed here, has played a part in the unique structure of the community at Lammas. Consequently, a defining characteristic of Tir-y-Gafel is that, rather than being a 'commune', it promotes the development of autonomous plots (Wimbush, 2014). Whilst there is a common commitment to permaculture and low impact development, each household functions independently; and the decision to become an 'eco-hamlet' rather than a 'commune' was taken collectively during the early stages of development (Tolle, 2011).

Lammas also aims to afford a similar level of freedom, individualism and entrepreneurial enterprise to that which is present in the towns and villages surrounding it, demonstrating that anyone wishing to live sustainably from the land can do so without sacrificing their freedom or conforming to a radically communal way of life. On the contrary, residents strive for a comfortable, modern lifestyle with Hi-Fi music and internet connection. As Tao states:

*'My wife is very conventional, you know when we got together she was very clear she came with a washing machine'.*

Residents also accept the use of fossil fuels unlike in other eco-villages such as Tinkers Bubble or Stewards Wood, and this, like many things at Lammas, is down to personal choice, reflecting the freedom of modern life within the context of a lifestyle that is more sustainable and 'tied to the Earth'. However, as discussed in Chapter Eight and in the following section, the development of a low-impact community involves more than the vision of a leader, and in maintaining the initiative, an important topic of analysis suggested by residents themselves is 'community relations'.

#### **4.1 Community Relations**

In contrast to highly structured, religious communities such as Scandavale and intentional communities such as Tinkers Bubble and Brithdir Mauw, in Lammas the family is the most important unit, and the community is therefore designed to accommodate for the needs of families. However this type of community is challenging for Leanne, the only single member who consequently reports to crave the emotional connection that a more organised social structure provides. Members have also indicated that social relations among residents are 'a bit prickly' (Leanne) and that 'there are political issues that need to be ironed out' (Kit).

However this conflict is seen by some members to be a process of 'bedding in', particularly, as Leanne states:

*'It's hard work being here, really heard, people are really pushed, d'you know.'*

Instead of opting to have 'no social remit', Sieben Linden's 'three meetings' approach, outlined in Chapter Two, may be adopted effectively by Lammas to enhance social cohesion. However, Lewis and Greenham (2014) point out that:

*'It is not the structure that will determine the patterns of meaning that emerge, but the quality and nature of the interactions between individuals within it'. (p.43)*

Sieben Linden's experience (see page 39) illustrates the way highly structured approaches to promote better community relations only work when the majority of group members sincerely desire greater connection through sharing their feelings and ideas. Should this approach be implemented 'from above', it would be impossible to predict whether the community of Tir-y-Gafel, with its natural and unique social dynamic, would react in a positive way or not, as the development of community relations is an inherently uncertain and experimental process.

Illustrating this, a ceremony was conducted at Lammas by a part Native American 'wisdom keeper' called 'Little Grandmother' who buried a crystal on the grounds of Tir-y-Gafel. Although the ceremony was intended to create a shared sense of place among residents and thereby promote deeper community relations, Leanne complains that:

*'It was a bit like they imposed it on us from on high, they didn't tell us until three days before she came that she was coming and then they just assumed that they could bury a crystal in common space without asking anybody and then it all got a bit fractious.'*

Leanne's negative recollection of the ceremony points to the way in which defiance may emerge from an actual or perceived social hierarchy. It also points to a potential gulf between the ideals held by organisers and the way that these are received by members. This gulf was observed in many cases through interviews with both organisers and members across the three organisations, and the current findings therefore support 'bottom up' approaches to community building that begin with nurturing individual relationships and promoting democratic group processes. Despite the 'fractious' nature of community relations at Lammas, this bottom-up process of developing individual friendships which may coalesce into community relations appears to be underway, as Kit comments:

*'It's not really a group friendship, they're individual friendships'.*

The development of community relations from these 'individual friendships' is an inherently uncertain process which is considered by Tao to be reliant, not on the imposition of social agendas, but on the principle that it *'comes from a place of voluntary give, good will'* (Tao Wimbush quoted in Tolle, 2011 p.19). For example, a play, 'The Wizard of Oz', was organised by the children of Tir-y-Gafel in June 2014 and was well received by the residents who joined together in support of the event. Despite their differences of opinion on this matter, Leanne agrees that:

*'Perhaps it's very exciting that there can be a process here and there can be a story that can lead us to a bit more social cohesion.'*

Another important consideration is the decision-making process practiced at Lammas and its impact on social relations within the community. As outlined in Chapter Four, the Board of Directors, which includes both residents and non-residents, are elected each summer to steer the organisation. During monthly Lammas meetings, the aim is for democratic governance to be achieved through full consensus on proposals, which requires 100 percent agreement, or 'unanimity' (Kaner, 1996). However when this is not possible, decisions may be overridden by the Board of Directors, as Tao states:

*'I think we do our BEST to ensure that everyone has a voice and there are times that our structure, whereby we have as an, organisation if you like, reserved the right to pull rank if needed'.*

Leanne's dissatisfaction with this hierarchical approach is indicated in her statement that:

*'What I say doesn't bear any weight in the scheme of things...if push came to shove they (the Directors) can make decisions over and above us'.*

The decision to aim for full consensus on proposals but when consensus is not reached, for Directors to make the decisions, is viewed by Tao as the best option to resolve group disagreements in a timely manner in order to meet the business remit of planners and those outside of the Lammas community. However, this approach may also contribute towards the underlying division and tensions that have been reported within the group. For example, Leanne complains that:

*'Oh the politics have been too difficult so we've just withdrawn into our plots...they've all got families which is great for them but I withdraw to a sort of exile'.*

This hierarchical approach to decision-making also violates Ostrom's (1990) principle of collective-choice arrangements for groups that manage common-pool resources which states that *'group members must be able to create at least some of their own rules and*

*make their own decisions by consensus'* (Wilson, 2013, p.22). Dissatisfaction and tension may result when group members are denied an equal level of say in group affairs.

While consensus-with-unanimity may appeal to Tao's aspirations for fairness and equality in Lammas, most community-based consensus trainers advise intentional community groups not to use consensus unless they meet the specific requirements for using it, that is, they are small, cohesive, cooperative and have enough time to work with material in depth<sup>5</sup>. This is because the ability to block or threaten to block proposals allows each member complete power over the group. As Hartnett (2011) suggests, consensus-with-unanimity therefore:

*'Necessitates that all group members have the ethics and maturity to use this power responsibly and this may not be a realistic expectation'.*

Consequently, many communities apply other rules to the consensus process including 'supermajority voting' with 90 percent, 80 percent or 70 percent agreement needed to pass the proposal, or consensus-minus-one and consensus-minus-two, that is, first trying for unanimity and then using a supermajority rule. In aiming to have a relaxed social remit in its formative phase, the decision-making process at Lammas is less explicit or formalised than the above suggestions. Tao also observes a natural hierarchy between group members in Lammas, as he comments:

*'There are some people...when they say something people don't put much weight on it whereas if someone's sort of quiet and considered when they talk then more weight is put on it'.*

In many cases, power over group decisions is reported to be abused, leading to a 'Tyranny of the Minority' and disruption or unease in the group. In contrast to allowing each member complete power, Hartnett (2011) suggests that:

*'True equality may be better secured by a system that ensures that no group member ever has the power to individually control the group.'*

This has been achieved by Kevin Wolf, co-founder of N Street Cohousing in Davis, California with the N Street Consensus Method. This applies the consensus process but replaces unanimity with a different decision rule: community members first seek consensus-with-unanimity, however, if one or more members block the proposal, those individuals organize a series of solution-oriented meetings with one or two proposal advocates to create a new proposal to address the same issues. This goes to a second meeting, where it

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<sup>5</sup> 'Consensus Basics' website: [www.treegroup.info](http://www.treegroup.info)

is likely to pass. If a new proposal is not created, the original proposal comes to a second meeting for a 75 percent super-majority vote, where it is also likely to pass. In 25 years at N Street Cohousing this process has happened only twice, with each amendment requiring only two solution-oriented meetings (Christian, 2012).

The N Street Consensus Method may be most appropriate for a community in its formative phase, but once the community has grown into a full-scale ecovillage including 'multiple centres of initiative', another whole-systems governance approach such as Holacracy may be necessary to supplement general monthly meetings and hierarchical governance by a single Board of Directors. This approach was developed in the United States in the early 2000's as a form of polycentric governance: it involves a distributed control system embedded within a fractal structure. Each 'centre of initiative' has the authority to create, execute, and measure its own processes, so tensions are resolved locally. Holacracy does not use a consensus-based system but one that integrates relevant input from each centre of initiative<sup>6</sup>. The desire for this type of equality is expressed by Leanne:

*'We don't have a way of sitting at the table with each other, that's how I feel...that sense of people coming together on an equal basis will sit at the table with each other, there is no hierarchy there is only us and that inherent equality that is...I suppose a sense of shared place'.*

Innovative collaborative governance processes such as Holacracy and the N Street Method are also being applied in second generation alternative currency systems such as Spice Time Credits and the Dane County Timebank in their efforts to promote 'co-production' (Cahn, 2000). Through affording group members agency and responsibility without allowing individual power over the group, these methods are found to generate a sense of connection, trust, and wellbeing among group members, whilst liberating energy, optimism, creativity, and the freedom to test new solutions (Christian, 2012).

A final consideration with regard to community relations in Lammas is the role of individual psychology in shaping group relations. Personal 'baggage' was referred to on occasion by both Tao and Leanne. Tao describes this as:

*'Issues that some people are able to resolve and move on and other people still can't'.*

Leanne specifically comments that with:

*'No decision making frameworks, no group norms, hardly any group culture...what do you have to fall back on, you have to fall back on the baggage that people bring.'*

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<sup>6</sup> [www.holacracy.com](http://www.holacracy.com)



Although Lammas provides a sanctuary for those wishing to escape or resolve personal difficulties, healthy community relations are required to aid in the healing process of such individuals. Keenan Dakota of Twin Oaks ecovillage in the USA argues that healthy communities require a high number of individuals who act as 'glue', holding the community together by creating 'a positive and supportive social environment, who help friends in trouble, and who take care of people in distress' (Dakota, 2010). Not all community members may be expected to possess these qualities however, and in this respect training in conflict resolution and non-violent communication provides an effective means of learning the skills necessary to build community. Leanne confirms that:

*'I was speaking to someone who does non-violent communication and she actually put me on a course called 'Dialogues and Communities' and actually that was really interesting.'*

Along with conflict resolution and innovative decision-making processes, certain preventative structural solutions to negative community dynamics have been suggested by Austerberry, who conducted 35 interviews in 18 ecovillages across Western Australia. He suggests screening potential members in terms of what they can offer to the community structure. For example, do they put in more than they take out (money, warmth and work towards the community)? Are they prepared not to get their way all the time? Do they tolerate others? As well as self-selection, a complex initiation process and trial period are found to naturally screen out the more hostile, volatile and less committed members. He also warns that the process by which a member may leave the community if they wish to do so should be made explicit to avoid members becoming trapped and toxic to the community, particularly in terms of legalities and finances (Austerberry, 2009).

Austerberry also found that the most successful communities he visited were designed to promote community spirit both structurally through large central facilities and common green space, and relationally through meetings, rituals and training. Community-building and interpersonal process skills such as conflict resolution were also prioritised. Indeed, the relationship between the physical and social aspects of community, being a key part of ecovillage life, was also drawn upon by Leanne, who states that:

*'We want to do building which links with the environment, which links with the human experience, but also it isn't just the built environment that's the revolution, the revolution is social: it's about our relationships.'*

However, measures taken at Lammas to manage community relations have so far been tentative and reactive to disputes as they are faced by the community. Perhaps pointing to hierarchical decision making processes at Lammas, Tao admits that:

*'We are still exploring structures and how to best do that is something that we're still working on and have still got a fair way to go.'*

## **4.2 Economic Relations**

Along with leadership and community relations, a third group factor to consider is the nature of economic relations within Lammas. Tao states that as a group, residents are on target to make 75 percent of their income from the land, in line with Pembrokeshire County Council's planning regulations. However, while the project is evaluated holistically, each individual is responsible for their own finances and the maintenance of their own plot. For example, in order to earn an income, Leanne regularly sells produce such as vegetables and eggs, while Tao sells fresh milk to his neighbours. Several residents also sell handmade items at local Christmas markets such as baskets, wooden chopping boards, fruit vinegars, jams and herbal soaps. At this early stage in development, earning an income does appear to be a high priority among residents, as Leanne eagerly describes:

*'I'm a bit more focussed on what I want to grow commercially and it's different (..) I've also been harvesting for the forager for Leander next door, so chickweed and sandal burnette and I've been getting a good price for that (..) this is weeds d'you know what I mean! Yeah and just produce that you can get from the berries and the hedges.'*

As well as making an income through selling surplus produce to each other, residents are able to save money by relying on their neighbours for help with technical and manual challenges. For example, Tao describes how:

*'Our car battery was flat this morning and if we were living in a suburb in Bath we would have called the AA and a van...and someone would have been employed to help us with the car. A neighbour happened to be visiting, we happened to mention it to him and he drove up with his car 10 minutes later, and so socially that's a much better exchange and environmentally that's a much better solution, and so those kinds of things happen a lot'.*

Economically within Lammas, the 'general appreciation for the varied skills and resources that everybody brings' points to the same fundamental principles that support the Dane County Timebank, Bristol LETS and Spice Time Credits, that is, everyone's time is valued equally, one hour for one hour. As discussed in Chapter Eight, the reciprocal practices that exist within all of these organisations add non-monetary value to the varied skills and resources of members. Tao explains this economic reciprocity at Lammas:

*'If somebody is not that good at land based stuff and pulling that together then that's ok because they bring other skills, from our perspective, and I know that's quite different to the planners perspective but I think for the moment we're happy to carry them if you like'.*

Tao also describes how:

*‘There’s a big kind of ‘gift economy’ that goes on in the background. Just wines exchanged for cheeses, for vegetables, this for that, and that has a very interesting social impact, one of which is a general feeling of abundance and wealth’.*

This early gift economy points to the beginnings of what may become a more established alternative micro-economy, comparable to the development of non-monetary economies in mainstream urban areas, as discussed in the previous sections. However, in this formative phase of its development, Lammas does not have its own currency, and indeed only two ecovillage communities have established successful and well-known local currency systems: Findhorn Ecovillage in northeast Scotland and Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage in Missouri in the United States.

Should the development of a sustainable local economy become appropriate for Lammas once it grows to a certain scale, members would need to supplement the casual and informal ‘gift economy’, *‘just wines exchanged for cheeses, for vegetables, this for that’* with a time-based and credit-based alternative currency system such as those used by LETS or DCTB. The example of Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage in Missouri, points to a particular route that Lammas may take in becoming more economically efficient and sustainable.

Intermediary organisations, land trusts, local government and commercial investors support the development of Dancing Rabbit’s ELM’s system by investing in the local currency to their mutual benefit. However, this type of external investment is appropriate to a relatively small community, that is, only 70 individuals and 30 businesses use Dancing Rabbit’s ELMs. As highlighted previously, the Findhorn Ecovillage on the other hand, has developed into ‘multiple centres of initiative’ as 250-300 people have gradually moved into the area and established 40 social enterprises, consultancies, and other initiatives. One of these is Ekopia, an Industrial and Provident Society that supports other local community enterprises including the Findhorn Foundation, Phoenix Shop, Findhorn Bay Holiday Park and the Blue Angel Café, who all trade in Ekos, the local community currency. Like ELMs, one Eko is the equivalent of one Pound Sterling, however only traders (not individuals) can exchange their Ekos for Sterling from Ekopia according to certain criteria. Through these regulations, the exchange of Pounds for Ekos by community members has allowed Ekopia to make low interest loans to organisations such as the Festivals Group, Youth Project and New Findhorn Association.

Ekopia currently has more than 250 members, providing a potentially diverse ‘spend network’ for this local currency. However, a risk identified by Gómez (2009, p. 89) is that as new participants join the exchange system, maintenance costs rise, which must be

supported by the initial administrative structure and resources provided for the project. In this regard, lessons may be learnt from the economically sustainable MAN model suggested by Stephanie (Chapter Four), which manages the flow of resources between projects. The development of digital Permacredits (a commodity backed crypto currency) within the global ecovillage and permaculture movement also holds the promise of bringing sustainable investment to progressive enterprises such as Lammas<sup>7</sup>.

To conclude, the example of Findhorn points to a second avenue that may be taken by Lammas in developing their bottom-up mechanism of exchange in the future: through collaboration between the various co-operative organisations that eventually comprise a well-established ecovillage community. The successful integration of the Eko into the local Findhorn community, demonstrated by a circulation of 15-20,000 Ekos since 2002, indicates how established ecovillages can act as centres for innovation in sustainable economy. However, it is important to note that the development of an exchange system within a community is, like it's unique social dynamic, an experimental social process which, as Tao states, must come 'from a place of voluntary give, good will.'

## **5. Convergence and Divergence of Group Factors**

An important part of the analysis presented here is to identify convergences and divergences between factors influencing the groups in question, in order to enable learning and development between community-economic initiatives.

First, the deeper level of 'interdependence' experienced within Lammas, points to a lesson that may be learnt among community exchange initiatives such as LETS and the DCTB. Advanced decision-making and community governance models such as a Holacracy, Scoiocracy, and the N Street Consensus Method become necessary and are developed and practiced within ecovillage communities due to the interdependence of residents and their separation from 'mainstream' communities. These models may be used to inspire other governance institutions as they represent new and innovative approaches to managing resources in a more sustainable way, tested in this case on a small scale Western community. To become scalable, the methods used in Lammas may be applied to corporate work environments and organisations of all kinds (see page 231), and indeed these processes are evident in Stephanie's community engagement, her use of needs-based empathy and games that enable better resource distribution within the DCTB. The

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<sup>7</sup> [www.permacredits.com](http://www.permacredits.com)

challenges faced within Lammas, particularly in terms of decision-making, also provide valuable lessons to communities and organisations looking to achieve a low impact lifestyle. This process of 'translation' is discussed further in the following Chapter.

Second, both Bristol LETS and the DCTB provide emotional support to vulnerable and elderly members. This was particularly evident within the LETS core-group, and inclusive social support structures are also built into the DCTB, for example in the form of Medical Transportation for dialysis patients. This type of supportive community was absent within Lammas, however, where social and emotional provision is currently limited to that offered within families. Consequently, Leanne, the only single resident reported experiencing loneliness as a result of the freedom practiced within this 'eco hamlet'. These findings suggest that within the dispersed urban communities of Bristol LETS and DCTB, structured mechanisms of support and exchange are required to build community ties. However, in Lammas communal living and structured mechanisms of social support are avoided, perhaps highlighting the influence of both geographic proximity and mutual interdependence on community relations. However, being in the initiation phase of development, mechanisms of social support may yet develop in Lammas.

Third, an important point of convergence is that the non-monetary transactions conducted within all three initiatives value members' time equally. Despite their different social, economic and environmental concerns, the principle of equality is therefore embedded within the economic structure of all three organisations, indicating its importance as a core principle of economic sustainability. Members of LETS and the DCTB maintain formal exchange systems which form the basis of their communities, while reciprocal transactions in Lammas are more informal. As discussed in the previous section, developing a more formal system of exchange within Lammas is contingent on the expansion and integration of the community with surrounding enterprises. Just as LETS and DCTB may learn lessons from the advanced social governance and decision making mechanisms that are developed in ecovillages, Lammas may learn from the advanced alternative economic systems that are currently being developed by community-economic initiatives in urban areas.

## **6. Discussion**

In contrast to the previous three chapters which focus on group members' motivations and experiences, this chapter has presented an organisational analysis of group structures and processes in answer to Research Question Two. It is important therefore to clarify this multi-level, mixed-methods approach that incorporates both individual and group-level

findings. As noted in Part Two, bridging the ontological divide between objectivism and constructivism is a challenge when constructing a mixed narrative of this type (Bryman, 2001; Smith and Deemer, 2000). This is particularly the case when multiple perspectives of group members support claims about group level structures and processes. Taking into account the subjective nature of social reality, it should be noted that further interviews may introduce additional themes regarding the initiation, maintenance and contraction of the groups.

However, as specified in the first objective of this study, 'analytic induction' allows the phenomenological reflections of a representative sample of group members to inform the interpretations made here with regard to group processes and structures (Hammersley, 1989; Robson, 1993). To accomplish this, analysis proceeded with tentative themes based on interviews and group observation, such as organisational structure in Bristol LETS, dynamic leadership in the DCTB, and decision making processes in Lammas. These themes were compared against each case in turn and the theory revised. This iterative analysis allowed the interpretations to be reflected upon and refined until they applied to the maximum number of cases, as demonstrated by the range of interview excerpts illustrating each factor.

The use of secondary data such as information from the LETS and DCTB websites, guidelines from Community Currencies Knowledge Gateway, and information about other community-economic initiatives such as Findhorn and Spice Time Credits also verified the selection of factors, which are analysed in relation to the literature. The hermeneutic analysis of secondary data sources supplements the first-hand experience of interviewees by uncovering the 'true intentions' of the organisations themselves, for example through organisation mission statements, regulations and by-laws. The use of secondary data from other initiatives also helps to determine the context in which texts are written and interpreted, allowing meaningful insights regarding group structures and processes that comment on the authors-in-context (Schleiermacher, 1998). This and the following chapter therefore aim to be 'ideographic', using the claims of particular individuals to illustrate more general claims about the organisations in question (Larkin et al. 2009).

The critical realist perspective taken here acknowledges both group structures and the multiple perspectives of group members to be real phenomena, demanding the researcher and reader to flick between subjective and objective frames of reference (Morgan, 2007, p.71). These analyses are therefore intersubjective, that is, they do not aim to offer an

objective account of material phenomena, but instead offer an in-depth insight into the social processes determining the initiation, maintenance and contraction of these community organisations (Stoecker, 1991). Based on the experiences of group members, the claims made regarding these processes are localised and context-dependent, while the links made to other community-economic initiatives and the experiences of practitioners further afield, extends the theoretical transferability of these findings to other initiatives in the developed West. Through this transparent account of the selected groups, taking into account researcher positionality as outlined in Chapter Five, the reader is invited to evaluate the transferability of the findings in relation to the broader context in light of their own experience and claims made in the literature (Warnock, 1987; Larkin et al. 2009). This holistic view of interpretation, which includes the researcher, participants and reader, agrees with Heidegger's concept of 'intersubjectivity'.

## **7. Chapter summary**

This chapter explored group factors pertaining to the initiation, maintenance and contraction of the selected initiatives. In its 'contraction' phase, the simple structure of LETS is argued to maintain a small but important niche presence among more elderly, ideologically motivated members. The DCTB, on the other hand, is maintained by strong leadership including factors such as entrepreneurial experience and a dynamic steering team, as well as by the polycentric structure of the organisation which includes person-to-agency Timebanking. Finally, as Lammas becomes more established as an intentional community, the influence of strong leadership coupled with a relaxed social remit, along with the development of democratic decision-making processes and economic exchange mechanisms is highlighted. This chapter also outlined points of convergence and divergence between the initiatives including differing governance, social care and exchange mechanisms as well as discussing the multi-level mixed-methods approach to answering Research Question Two in light of the findings presented. To conclude the presentation of the results, the following chapter turns to the wider social movements and their contextual influences before this these analyses are used in the concluding chapter to inform the direction of future organisational developments.

## Chapter Eleven

### The Social Movements and their Contextual Influences

#### 1. Introduction

The previous chapter provided an organisational analysis of group processes and structures and this is continued in the current chapter by looking at the wider social movements of which these initiatives are a part, as well as their contextual influences. Again, this is in answer to Research Question Two:

*What processes lead to the formation, maintenance and contraction of these initiatives?*

This chapter situates the groups within the LETS, Timebank and Ecovillage movements and as such presents the broadest analysis of the thesis. It acknowledges that the groups themselves are neither isolated nor static, but instead are the result of the motivations and objectives of individuals, as outlined in Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine. This adds a temporal element to the study of these organisations as it documents the work that is undertaken by group members to expand their organisations and contribute towards the broader LETS, Ecovillage and Timebank movements.

In an on-going study, Seyfang and Longhurst (2014) apply Strategic Niche Management theory to grassroots innovations in order to address the challenge of understanding transitions to sustainability. The authors propose that innovative social models may be diffused in society through three routes: replication, where projects multiply; scaling up, where projects recruit participants and grow in scale; and translation, where innovations are taken up and applied in different contexts (Seyfang, 2009; Raven, 2012). A similar framework of horizontal, vertical, and transversal 'scaling up' has also been popularised by the United Nations in ongoing research into the Social and Solidarity Economy (Utting, 2015). Building on this current research endeavour, section two discusses each community-economic model in turn, drawing on the first-hand accounts of group members to reveal methods of replication, scaling-up and translation that have been both successful and unsuccessful.

Section three then looks at the wider contextual influences that effect and are affected by the social movements in question. It aims to supplement the analysis of internal factors in Chapter Ten by looking at the external factors influencing the development of these



groups. Again, a process of analytic induction was used to analyse interview transcripts, along with a wide range of secondary data sources to uncover the 'true intentions' of the organisations themselves and comment on the 'groups-in-context' (Larkin, 2009). The wide range of secondary data sources drawn upon in this chapter contributes towards the theoretical transferability of the findings by situating the selected case studies within a wider context. This is highlighted in section four, which provides a comparison of the contextual influences discussed in order to inform future organisational developments.

## **2. The Social Movements**

This section proceeds to analyse each movement in turn by looking at the three routes of diffusion suggested by Seyfang and Longhurst: replication, scaling-up and translation (Seyfang and Longhurst, 2014).

### **2.1 LETS**

As indicated in Chapter Four, Local Exchange Trading Schemes emerged in 1989, followed by a rapid expansion in the 1990's. For example, in the UK the number of LETS expanded from only five schemes in 1992 (Lee 1996; Williams 1996), to an estimated 450 in 1998 (LETSLink UK, 1998). However, Williams (2001) reports only 303 groups operating in the UK, suggesting that following their rapid introduction, the replication of LETS has plateaued.

The second route of diffusion, 'scaling up', is necessary in LETS given that among existing groups, the majority of trading is reported to occur among a small core group (Bendell, 2015). Williams (1996) also reports an average of only 72 active members per LETS group and in Bristol LETS, for example, there are 146 accounts, of which only 26 are inactive. The Wiltshire Exchange Scheme, launched in 2014 in Salisbury, Wiltshire provides an example of an organisation that attempts to 'scale up' the LETS model by connecting individuals, voluntary organisations and businesses in rural villages across Wiltshire. The launch event, held in Trowbridge Town Hall on 27 March 2014 was, however, only attended by three interested parties: one member of the public, a representative of Community First and a representative of Wiltshire Wildlife Trust.



*Attendees at the Wiltshire Exchange Scheme Launch, Trowbridge, personal photo taken on the 27 March 2014*

Prior to its launch, Wiltshire Exchange Scheme founder Mike Lennard (far right), gave a series of presentations during 2013 at Wiltshire-based voluntary sector networking 'Cluster' events run by the community development organisations, GROW and Community First<sup>8</sup> (Smith, 2013). Great interest was shown in the LETS system by, as Mike states:

*'People who are involved in charity work or represent people who have special needs and they can see the need for something like that, where once again people use their skills to support each other....as well as other people in the County who couldn't join LETS however much they wanted to because there wasn't a local group.'*

The objective was that, as Mike states, *'the Wiltshire exchange scheme will be the umbrella, if you like, for the Wiltshire groups'* and since March 2014, 128 member accounts have been created (57 individuals, 71 organisations) but no trading has taken place between them. As discussed in the previous chapter, this may result from the basic LETS platform it employs. A lack of innovation, partly a result of being volunteer-run, may fail to meet the needs of target-driven organisations that are aimed at community development and social service delivery. Without an employed broker to match 'offers' and 'wants' (as in the DCTB) voluntary group members are required to expend resources in finding volunteers to meet their specific requirements. The LETS platform used by the Wiltshire Exchange Scheme is shown below:

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<sup>8</sup> The GROW Salisbury Cluster networking event featured as one of the eight case studies which formed part of the VCT Impact survey. This was undertaken as a pilot to the current thesis (Smith, 2013)



Screenshot of the Wiltshire Exchange Scheme online platform, sourced from [www.wiltshire.exchangescheme.org](http://www.wiltshire.exchangescheme.org)

In ‘scaling up’ the system up to enable person-to-organisation and organisation-to-organisation exchange, a means is required of bringing organisations and individuals together. This is achieved by the Spice Time Credits system in ‘localities’, which employs brokers to:

*‘Build concentrated local ‘Alliances’ of public, community and private organisations, in sharing resources more effectively. Organisations build new relationships with their citizens by asking people how they would like to contribute to the community and to services and then empowering them in giving their time (giving ‘Time In’). The Alliance’s ‘thank’ people for their contributions with a credit for every hour given, with which they can access trips, events and activities provided by the Alliance (receiving ‘Time Out’).’*

Instead of simply ‘growing the organisation’, which is impractical for mutual credit systems beyond ‘community’ scale, the Spice system is scaled up to ‘engage the many’ by working in partnership with housing associations, schools, public service providers, community groups, Government and private organisations. The six targeted areas identified by Spice: housing, schools, localities, sustainability, wellbeing and international, ensure that while the model and methodology is replicable through different sectors of society, the system remains tangible at a ‘community’ scale through the use of bespoke time credits. This more resilient system is described by one Spice volunteer as:

*‘A network of small groups looking after the community’; a network which, when scaled up, is seen to provide a new layer of democracy’.*

The final route of diffusion is translation, and indeed, the replicable structure and methodology of LETS has enabled the model to be implemented in 39 countries across the globe, each with a unique socio-economic landscape. Pooling and disseminating knowledge through social networks has resulted in the translation of LETS into novel contexts, for example, from Canada, to the UK, to the Systeme d'Exchange Locaux system in France, Ithaca Hours in the USA and the Truque barter market in Argentina (Jacob *et al*, 2004; North, 2007).

Although LETS has achieved global prevalence, limitations in the design of LETS means that it has not become the catalyst for social change that it was hoped to be in the 1990's (Shroeder, 2011). For complex and embedded second generation models, however, 'translation' becomes more difficult. The success of Spice Time Credits, for example, may be related in part to the unique socio-economic context and cultural history of mutualism that exists in the deprived valleys of South Wales, which have suffered the decline of coal mining and heavy industry leading to widespread depression, and unemployment levels which are double the national average<sup>9</sup>. This cultural heritage is drawn upon on Spice's website, which states that:

*'In South Wales, the traditions of people working together gave birth to the mutual societies, educational settlement trusts, miner's welfare institutes and chapels during the 19th and 20th century.'*

In these small communities, the Spice model has a significant impact, such as in Blaengarw, for example, where the number of individuals actively contributing their time to their community has risen from 25 to over 700, out of a total population of 2000. In this regard Seyfang and Longhurst (2014) suggest that:

*'Landscape pressures or regime 'crises' can be a necessary precursor for a niche innovation to have a substantive impact on the incumbent regime' (p.17).*

From this evidence, as well as from the comparable success of the Allied Community Co-op in the deprived Allied Drive community of Wisconsin (see page 157), it is evident that applied time credit models are most easily translated to other small rural communities, and particularly those suffering social and economic need. Similarly, the Transition Town model, which was intended as a 'detox' for the developed West has met with unexpected success in the less economically developed South as an 'alternative to development' (Hopkins,

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<sup>9</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)

2008). This highlights the potential for second-generation, socially embedded models to succeed within less economically developed countries.

The progression of LETS through to stage four in the development and diffusion of new innovations (see page 58) created an 'emerging institutional field' which 'becomes a useful resource for experimental projects in new locations' (Raven, 2012). The creation of an institutional field through online resources, intermediary organisations and networking events has resulted in the birth of new and innovative models such as Spice, applied Time Banking and new alternative currencies. Currency innovators speaking at the launch of the Guild of Independent Currencies (5 November 2014) indeed commented that their projects were inspired by the institutional legacy of LETS. However, the fear among those developing the Bristol Pound and Totnes Pound is that their local currencies could similarly face contraction as more innovative models supersede them.

The high rate of failure and contraction among alternative currency systems is alluded to by Matthew Slater, software developer for Community Forge and Community Exchange Systems, who comments on the online Community Currencies Forum that:

*'Many systems 'exist' because they were created but show little or no activity. In Community Forge, which hosts around 90 sites, I estimate that around two thirds of sites we are asked to create are not used. The number is probably similar for CES which has over 700 installations.'* (CCForum, 2013)

However, it may be argued that the continuous emergence, failure and succession of community currency projects is an essential process in the development of new social structures and technological innovations that are adaptive to changing social, economic and environmental conditions.

To conclude this section, in creating a shift from the current economic 'monoculture' to a more resilient monetary ecosystem, the processes of replicating, scaling-up and translating the original LETS model into a wide and diverse range of contexts is seen as being essential, as Stephanie Rearick argues in the online Community Currencies Magazine:

*'A lot of people operating in their communities, adapting different models for their own need and spreading outwards from there, reaching out towards each other, can ultimately bring about that tipping point.'* (Rearick, CCMag, 2012)

Reflectively reporting and learning from both successful and unsuccessful trajectories is also an essential step in this process, and to this end Jerome Blanc, speaking at the Second International Conference on Complementary Currency Systems, states that research should

not aim for greater efficiency in the alternative currency movement, but should enable greater experimentation (Blanc, CCS, 2013).

## **2.2 Timebanking**

In terms of replication, evidence suggests that the number of Timebanks throughout the world has increased. By 2014 'Timebanks USA' list 460 groups: 403 in the USA, 16 in Canada and 41 internationally (TBUSA, 2014). Furthermore, 'Timebanking UK' currently reports working with 290 groups. However, no comprehensive global survey of Timebank frequency and activity currently exists, despite the development of databases to which organisations may register.

The development of international databases and data repositories on Timebanking plays an important role in the replication of these initiatives. In December 2014 the 'Community Currency Knowledge Gateway', a project of the New Economics Foundation and Community Currencies in Action was established with support from the European Union (INTERREG). This is the most extensive and comprehensive source of knowledge and resources in the emerging community currencies field, and includes practical tool-kits designed to help new projects get off the ground.

As suggested by Raven (2012), the consolidation of online resources for those wishing to establish a Timebank or other peer-to-peer system represents stage four in the process of diffusion, an 'emerging institutional field' which 'becomes a useful resource for experimental projects in new locations'. The existence of this resource inspires cycles of innovation as depicted below (Seyfang and Longhurst, 2014), eventually resulting in what they describe as a:

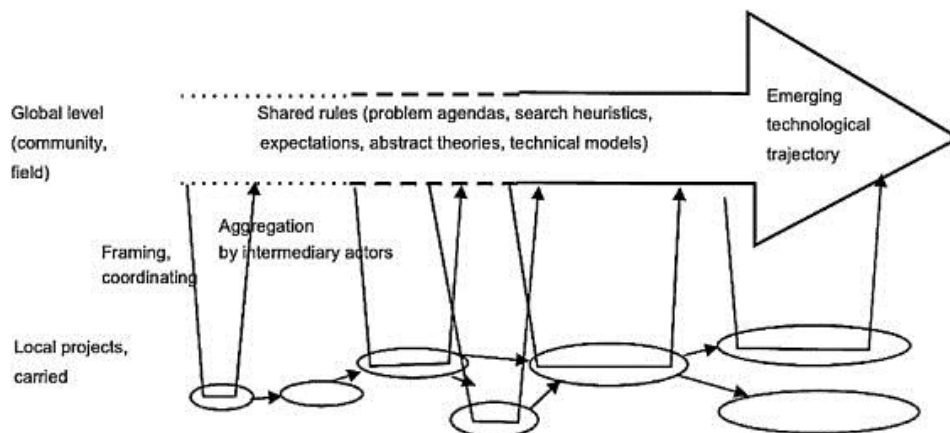
*'Stable institutional field which may influence the prevailing regime or become a viable competing practice.'* (p.4)

The continued contribution by practitioners to the Community Currency Knowledge Gateway is intended to enable more evidence-based replication to occur, increasing the frequency and success rate of new Timebanks and quickening the emergence of a 'stable institutional field' that might influence current practices on a larger scale (Raven, 2012).

The 'Timebank Knowledge Commons', which forms part of the Community Currencies Knowledge Gateway, is a continually growing collection of materials, manuals, funding and

project proposals, videos and articles to help individuals start or find existing Timebanks. Although it is a collaborative endeavour, this project has been developed over several years through a collaborative project called 'Knit-a-Network' founded by Stephanie Rearick through her international connections within the Timebanking movement, including members of the NEF and Community Currencies in Action.

This example illustrates the way in which key individuals contribute towards the alternative currency movement by working at both a local and international level. Indeed, the suggestion made at a MAN meeting was that 'when acting at a local level one is simultaneously acting at a macro level'. Importantly, Stephanie's contribution to the Community Currencies Knowledge Gateway indicates that Raven's (2012) 'cycles of innovation', which move between local iterations and the emerging global institutional structure, are facilitated by those working simultaneously in both of these domains. These connecting agents are argued to have a crucial role in pushing the emerging technological trajectory forward. As the Knowledge Commons continues to expand through the contributions of practitioners, the experiences and experiments carried out in local Timebanks are a highly valuable source of information to the global 'Knowledge Commons'.



*Raven's cycles of innovation, sourced from Seyfang and Longhurst, (2014) [www.grassrootsinnovations.com](http://www.grassrootsinnovations.com)*

These cycles also point to the role of intermediary organisations, for example think-tanks such as the NEF, in supporting the consolidation of this knowledge into a potential institutional field. The NEF's Community Currencies in Action partnership has for a time supported the development of six community currencies across Europe including Spice Time Credits. Its culmination in 2015, leaving the 'Knowledge Gateway', points to the importance of new partnerships and projects at the intermediary and global level to be taken up by future contributors to the movement.

This section now moves on to discuss the second route of diffusion, 'scaling up'. According to Seyfang (2004), the average number of participants in a Timebank seldom exceeds a few hundred active members. This suggests that, as with LETS schemes and other mutual credit systems, the scaling up of Timebanks is limited by their functionality, which is optimal at a community scale. This was indeed evident at the DCTB: despite having 2250 registered members, only 200 accounts are active and this activity is most likely supported by the development of a natural community.

As with Spice Time Credits in Wales, however, 'scaling up' is approached by Stephanie and her colleagues, not simply by increasing the size of the organisation through additional pilot sites but also by developing its structure, incorporating different elements and allowing it to become more embedded in the social economy or as Stephanie states, *'integrated, part and parcel of the fabric of people's lives and it's not even a question'*. This is approached through the development of Mutual aid Networks (MANs) which incorporates a range of cooperative structures that each fulfil a different, complementary role in economic and community life (see page 75-76).

The development of MANs involves collaboration with a range of institutions: housing associations, schools, public service providers, community, Government and private organisations (Cahn, 2000). The Energy Project at the Allied Community Co-op, for example works with Madison Gas and Electric (MGE, see page 157). Importantly, co-production between the Dane County Timebank and MGE aims to raise awareness of energy saving in deprived neighbourhoods is in the interests of both Allied Drive residents and MGE, and so this non-monetary partnership is made possible as both parties share a common goal.

Similarly, proposals were made at the Transportation Builders Workshop (23/04/2014) for the DCTB to collaborate with community centres, churches and bowling clubs to better enable free transportation to the more vulnerable (see Chapter Nine). These groups are targeted based on a shared moral vision, for example, clubs for the elderly have vans which may be shared, and through such partnerships, community resources are pooled and better disseminated to meet community needs. During the initial stages of diffusion for MANs (Raven, 2012), collaboration with third parties who share a common goal, such as promoting social and environmental justice, are found to be the most feasible and successful. Using this approach, Spice Time Credits has achieved a membership of 500-1500, while the average Timebank has only a few hundred members. By January 2014 Spice was also working with 521 organisations using Time Credits.



In the initial stages of developing MANs, the final route of diffusion, translation, has consciously been taken on by Stephanie as she aims to establish at least six MAN pilot sites in different locations around and outside the United States. These will be formed by individuals wishing to develop and formalise a community improvement initiative that they are involved with. Initially, the following eight community projects have registered their interest in becoming members of the MAN:

- Pennsylvania Health and Wellness project
- Detroit Work Re-design project
- Michigan Food Collective project
- Ithaca Local Economy project
- St. Louis Timebank Network
- Chicago Time Exchange project
- France Cooperative project
- River Hours (Portland, Oregon)

Translating the MAN model to remote communities requires participants to take a risk in becoming a pilot site. Potential pilots are first required to 'see a way that participation can be mutually beneficial', as well as being required to 'take responsibility for stewardship of the project, ideally with a three year commitment', and be 'willing and able to secure additional resources to secure your local project' (DCTB Website). Because MANs are intended to be part of a new economic paradigm and a new way of thinking, this requires trust and commitment. In the case of some potential pilots, trust is built through personal connection with Stephanie and a shared understanding of the MAN vision. Although MANs may have the potential to transform communities across the United States, for many, trust in the proposal of a radical systems change may be, as highlighted at the Spice Conference (14<sup>th</sup> November 2014), *'too far too fast'*.

Indeed, according to Seyfang and Longhurst (2014), the most common problem experienced by new alternative currencies in the initial stages of diffusion is attracting participants and recruiting people to use the currency. This obstacle was reported across nearly all of their twelve case studies. They state that this appears to be 'a fairly universal problem' in the community currency field because:

*'Community currencies are radical innovations of which users might be wary and require reassurance that it can meet their needs (Longhurst, 2012), and it does indeed need to meet*

*their needs so as to fulfil expectations of performance that have been generated among users.’ (p.17)*

To this end, a transparent, evidence-based method is adopted by Spice Time Credits. However, rather than taking a top-down approach that is highly ‘technical and mechanical’, Stephanie focuses on gaining trust by unlocking the immediate needs of communities and determining how these may be met by ‘allowing resources to flow to where they are needed’ (design team meeting 04/04/2014). This is a highly interactive process, for which Stephanie uses an ‘Icebreaker Game’, the ‘Timebanking Yarn Game’ and the ‘Build a Better World Game’ which teaches players how to unlock and connect needs and assets, build connections based on empathy, and overcome barriers by coming together as a community to meet common goals. Although it remains for the impact of this approach to be observed and recorded as the MAN develops, it’s initial success in creatively meeting the needs of community members with their collective assets was evident at the Transportation Builders’ Workshop (23<sup>rd</sup> April 2014) reported in Chapter Eight.

As the MAN model is translated to various pilot sites, the trust of new participants is garnered through developing a sound legal infrastructure, that is, through establishing bylaws and core values. This is an ongoing process and it is expected that all MANs will continue to share these principles, as well as the processes, tools, outcomes and improvements outlined in the MAN ‘starter kit’ to be provided by Stephanie and colleagues. This process of ‘trans-local learning’ (inspired by Berkana, see page 60) aims to provide each local MAN with access to a much broader array of expertise and resources than is possible in isolated Timebanks. However, it should be noted that a large body of evidence suggests that the ‘one size fits all’ approach is not applicable to the management of context-dependent local initiatives which may require differing templates (Smith, 2013).

A final process to consider is one that was found to occur naturally in all three groups as members interact with each other in their community. This is the natural ‘mushrooming’ of the community-economic initiative. For example, rather than belonging to several social circles, the social life of DCTB members is structured through events, activities and subgroups that ‘spin-off’ from the Timebank. For example, Joe states that:

*‘I have other connections, as far as (.) the yoga class (affiliated to the DCTB) and then just getting together with friends which are also part of Timebank but then we get together socially just to go out for drink, have a conversation.’*

A recent evaluation of Spice Time Credits highlights that 95 members have set up their own community groups as a result of participation in Spice (Spice, 2014). Similarly, Dan

(Lammas) describes how the charisma and woodwork expertise of Tim at Cherry Wood Project in Somerset has inspired four similar projects near Bath, including the Heartwood Project, another successful ecovillage. This type of replication may be supported through both interpersonal factors such as strong inspiring leadership, and system factors such as a design that encourages proposals for community-run projects and an effective allocation of time credits to enable such projects.

A study by Gregory (2012) highlights the way time credits facilitate group expansion by 'accomplishing what lack of money prohibits' (p. 25). In this regard, the 'Hours' issued by the MAN Timebank are crucial not only to inspire project proposals and deliver project goals, but as the system expands, incorporated credit systems increasingly determine the way projects are co-designed and delivered. For example, projects that rely on shared resources and enable credit earning are deemed more feasible than unsustainable, high-cost projects and so the organisation 'mushrooms' in such a way that supports these sustainable initiatives.

### **2.3 The Ecovillage Movement**

This final subsection considers diffusion within the Ecovillage movement. The first route, replication, involves a physical increase in the number of ecovillages, permaculture gardens and sustainable low impact dwellings. Although 872 projects are listed on the GEN Network in 70 countries, Seyfang (2010) considers this to be a niche innovation in contrast to the mainstream housing market, where around 150,000 new dwellings are built annually in the UK, now totalling 26 million houses. This is in contrast to the UK's estimated 400 low impact houses (White, 2002).

The model of low-impact housing faces many challenges in becoming replicable within the high volume housing market. This is because the fundamental differences between mainstream housing and low-impact development stem from differences in their underlying ethos, and replicating unique and context-dependant ecovillages thousands of times over for the volume housing market is therefore unrealistic. These differences are indicated in Table Ten below:

*Table Ten: Comparison between low impact and mainstream housing*

<b>Mainstream housing</b>	<b>Low-impact development</b>
Materials are purchased in bulk and shipped in from central supply outlets.	Residents make artistic use of locally sourced natural and recycled materials.
Homes are valued through internal fixtures and fittings that provide a high level of comfort.	Homes are valued on their environmental performance and artistic value.
Standardization supports generic, subcontracted labour, use of well-known designs and construction techniques. Builders wary of pursuing innovations.	Low impact building requires unique skills in carpentry, woodwork, craftsmanship, sustainable design, Permaculture and community enterprise.
Occupants assumed to be passive and conservative, given little opportunity to become involved in the design and build of their property.	Occupants actively co-design and build their bespoke properties.

Furthermore, the amount of cheaply available open countryside for ecovillages is increasingly limited and subject to zoning restrictions. Replicating the ecovillage model commercially would also rely on expensive manual labour rather than unpaid ‘community builds’, and the skills and flexibility required are contrary to mainstream building practices (as noted above). Finally, eco-houses place demands on occupants’ living practices, which are managed by Lammas residents, but may be undesirable for the mainstream buyer market.

Innovations that are found to diffuse most successfully are those that are most compatible with the dominant regime, that is, they do not contradict established regulations, infrastructure, user practices and maintenance networks, and demand very little change in socio-technical practice. Seyfang (2010) therefore predicts that ecovillage development, as a more radical niche, is unlikely to diffuse successfully into the wider regime as it demands too many changes in social structure and building practice. For the ecovillage model to be made profitable, the mainstream housing market would need to be ‘placed under concerted pressure to become more sustainable’ (Smith, 2007, p.427), and Seyfang (2010) therefore argues that the scope for replication is limited in terms of numbers, a sentiment that is also expressed by Tao as he reflects on the gulf between mainstream society and the small niche that he occupies:

*‘We are a society in decline and are unable to do anything about it is kind of the general feeling that I get from the mainstream and people. Within the movement itself, it feels*

*really good and really strong, attracting really good people and there's a real optimism and a real hope, but we represent such a tiny, tiny part of society'.*

Nevertheless, despite its small size, Lammas looks to pioneer an alternative model for living on the land which empowers others to embark on a low-impact lifestyle. As such, the ecovillage is designed using a traditional smallholding model, combined with the latest innovations in environmental design, green technology and permaculture. It aims to provide a model that is more replicable than that of preceding ecovillages, enhanced by the new legal framework that supports it.

Thus, the first major contribution of Lammas to the replication of low impact developments is its participation in Policy 52, the low-impact development planning policy adopted by Pembrokeshire County Council and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority. Through testing Policy 52, Lammas became the first ecovillage in the UK to obtain prospective planning permission. This led to the Welsh Assembly Government's 'One Planet Development' policy for the open countryside, which is outlined and supported by further guidance contained in Technical Advice Note 6 (TAN6, July 2010) *'Planning for Sustainable Rural Communities'*. These guidelines make it easier for future low impact developers to gain planning permission in Wales, as well as providing a replicable model for low-impact planning policy in other countries, making these developments more likely in the future.

The second contribution to the replication of low-impact communities are the materials that Lammas provide to those interested in setting up an ecovillage or embarking on a low-impact lifestyle. The Lammas website includes an archive containing the most commonly requested files pertaining to their planning application, including their site layout, business plan, traffic management plan, permaculture report, woodland management plan, legal documents, as well as geology, soil, water and ecology reports. Through making these documents available Tao has indeed, as he states, *'carved a path for ordinary people to get out of the mainstream and into the alternative world'*, particularly for those who are interested in setting up such a community in the Welsh countryside but do not have the confidence or expertise to navigate the legal procedures involved. Fifteen further applications for planning permission in Pembrokeshire are listed on the Lammas website following Tao's successful application, with six granted, five refused and four pending.

Third, like most ecovillages, Lammas runs guided tours every Saturday from April to October along with a range of courses, conferences and events throughout the year such as the 'Low Impact Experience Week', 'Building a Reciprocal Frame Roundhouse' and 'Cob

Building'. One Planet Development training courses are also hosted by Lammas in conjunction with the One Planet Council, an independent voluntary body which enables and promotes low-impact developments. Finally, Lammas is also one of the only ecovillages in the UK to actively and publicly support independent academic research studies into low-impact living, and a selection of these is included on the website. These actions have attracted media attention and made Lammas a true 'centre for research, demonstration and training' (Gilman, 1991): an approach that is argued to be slowly growing the movement across the world (Seyfang, 2010).

The education and training provided at Lammas promotes the replication of ecovillage projects as the same 'mushrooming' effect described in the DCTB occurs. This happens when individuals are drawn in by the opportunity to learn new skills in low-impact design, basket-weaving etc. but then, through the charisma and expertise of 'champions' in the group (Pink, 2009), become inspired to engage in a low impact life or start a project of their own, as Leanne recalls:

*'I remember seeing a notice for a CSA community supported agriculture and I went along to that meeting...and I suddenly felt some sort of connection back to land in a way that I knew that I wanted.'*

Similarly Joe refers to the role of Kristin, a yoga teacher, as inspiring him to join,

*J: She (Kristin), was part of the initial inspiration for things possible*

*C: And what was it that made you want to join?*

*J: Because of the different things that she had asked for help with you know, it was just like a natural progression.*

Skills-sharing, for example through yoga or community supported agriculture, as opposed to teaching ideology, in this way provides a doorway through which leaders inspire others to engage more fully with an alternative way of life. Dan, for example, describes how he was inspired by Tim who is a 'master woodworker' managing the Cherry Wood Project near Bath in the UK. Indeed, Tim's charisma and expertise in woodwork is reported to have inspired four similar projects, including the Heartwood Project also near Bath. The majority of ecovillage communities work to inspire and educate others, and this is vital to the expansion of the ecovillage movement in creating social change.



*Basket Weaving course and Tao leading a community meeting at Lammas, photos sourced from [www.lammas.com](http://www.lammas.com)*

The second route of diffusion involves scaling up existing ‘intentional community-style ecovillage projects’ to become full-scale ecovillages or eco-towns, comprising 500-1000+ people and ‘multiple centres of initiative’ (Gilman, 1999). For example, the largest ecovillages in Europe include Damanhur in Italy (600 people), Christiana Freetown in Copenhagen, Denmark (1000 people), Tribe of Likatien in Germany (280 people) and Beneficio near Grenada, Spain (200 people).

The previous chapter described how, over the years Findhorn in Scotland has grown to 250-300 people, as non-members have established 40 new centres of initiative on the outskirts of the initial ‘Findhorn Foundation’. The current study suggests that in these early stages in its development, there is evidence of a similar process of ‘scaling up’ occurring at Tir-y-Gafel as non-members look to buy the plots of land surrounding the ‘Lammas Low-impact Living Initiative Ltd’ in order to be part of the extended Lammas ecovillage. Dave, an adjacent neighbour, explains that:

*‘No we’re not directly connected at all except yeah feeling-wise and socially-wise but yeah (.) yeah we participate and are very happy to see it here.’*

Dave and his wife decided to buy a cottage near Tir-y-Gafel, as he states:

*‘Being aware of Lammas and the presence of, and thinking yeah, we’ve got a lot in common with the people there so lets’ go for that one.’*

Confirming the trend for like-minded individuals like Dave to join onto the outskirts of ecovillages and thereby expand the movement, Tao comments that:

*'I think it has surprised us all how quickly it is expanding, all we can do is just try to KEEP UP and kind of make sure that all the access arrangements and all the water arrangements add up across the board.'*

These access arrangements indicate that, as Tao states:

*'In many ways they (those who have bought the plots surrounding Lammas) are just as much part of the ecovillage as the nine plots that are in the middle, so for me when I talk about the ecovillage I think I draw a broad circle here.'*

This demonstrates the way an 'intentional community-style eco-village project' can work as a catalyst or seed that over time attracts others who draw inspiration from an alternative culture and low-impact way of life.

Dave particularly values, as he states, *'having the time to say hello to people without them freaking out'*. He also explains that he follows *'a biodynamic as well as organic gardening methods'*, suggesting that the principles and practices adopted by the residents of Tir-y-Gafel slowly diffuse outwards through their daily interactions with neighbours. It may be argued that, as neighbours aim for acceptance and recognition within the group, they not only promote the alternative culture of Lammas but eventually, as at Findhorn, establish co-operatives and social enterprises that offer practical benefit to the Lammas Low-impact Living Initiative, and in this reciprocal manner, 'scaling up' occurs. However, despite being the most practical, this route of diffusion may also be the slowest.

Finally, the specific technologies and practices of ecovillage life at Lammas may be translated into the very different context of mainstream living. Technologies such as the leat system (an aqueduct dug into the ground to provide hydro-electric power), the use of Community Permaculture techniques, rainwater harvesting, cob building and principles for social organisation may be applied to mainstream practices in a feasible way. Smith (2007) argues that a focus on translating ecovillage practices and innovations is a valuable avenue for theory development because as they diffuse into the mainstream they are compared to existing technologies, practices, skills attributes and markets, and so the way they are interpreted and 'marketed' becomes important. The technologies are translated as opportunities open up within mainstream culture for these ideas to develop such as through the One Planet Development and Green policies that aid the diffusion of solar



panels and other energy efficient technologies. For example, installing solar PV in the UK does not require planning permission as they are classified as 'Permitted Developments'<sup>10</sup>.

However, according to Smith, (2007) these adaptations are seen as ad-hoc and piecemeal rather than offering a holistic solution. Shove (1998) also argues that a 'chasm of meaning between the differing socio-technical contexts' allows only a technical transfer of knowledge, while the holistic and embedded lifestyle that is practiced at Lammas is lost in translation, as Tao confirms:

*'At the heart what we're doing is building an alternative culture here and the ecovillage is just a kind of framework for the culture to evolve.'*

In order to translate green culture and practices into the mainstream, some activists and ecovillage residents therefore expend much energy in adapting their way of life to resemble the dominant regime (Smith, 2007). This is evident in Tao's four year legal struggle to gain planning permission before building, which has increased the normality, familiarity and acceptability of Lammas among Government officials and among mainstream families wishing to live sustainably within the law. The legalisation and corporatisation of eco-villages (Lammas Low Impact Initiative is classified an Industrial and Provident Society), also contributes towards better 'resembling the regime'. The description of Lammas as an 'eco-hamlet' also distinguishes between the type of communal living that many associate with hippie communes, and the freedom, individualism and entrepreneurial enterprise practiced in Lammas. Finally, Lammas aims to merge mainstream and alternative culture through striving for a comfortable, modern lifestyle. As noted previously, residents accept the use of fossil fuels and enjoy television and internet connection, reflecting the freedom of modern life within the context of a low-impact lifestyle. This is considered to be more appealing to mainstream society, providing as Tao states, *'a viable and accessible route for ordinary people to get out of the mainstream and into the alternative world'*.

### **3. Contextual Influences**

This section explores the external factors or 'contextual influences' that work in synthesis with the movements' internal structures and processes outlined previously. The contextual factors identified in the data as being of greatest influence to the selected groups are: the cultural context, the legal and regulatory context, social services provision and access to

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<sup>10</sup> [www.ukpower.co.uk](http://www.ukpower.co.uk)

finance, technological influences and the academic context. The influence of these contextual factors on the replication, scaling-up and translation of these initiatives is discussed in section four.

### **3.1 Cultural Context**

The first major influence on the chosen initiatives is the cultural context of their respective locations. For example, given the history and heritage of Bristol, the existence of a culturally 'alternative' demographic in the city may influence the continued existence of Bristol LETS.

By the mid-18th century Bristol was England's second largest city and trading port, providing Britain with goods including sugar cane, tobacco, rum and cocoa, all of which were products of the slave trade. As well as having a rich maritime heritage, Bristol has also been a multicultural city since the 1950s and 1960s, when the first waves of immigration made it one of the most racially diverse in the UK. This cultural mix brought new strands of music such as reggae and in 1980, following a police raid on the popular Black and White Café, the St Pauls riots erupted, being the first of the decade's civil disturbances. Around this time, the Bristol underground scene was steeped in punk, reggae and hip-hop influences and *Salon* magazine stated that 'trip hop' was spawned in '*the bohemian, multi-ethnic city of Bristol*' (Salon, 1995).

By definition, the Bristol underground scene tends to separate from the mainstream and some commentators describe an undercurrent of 'darkness' within the city due to its history (Baker, 2009), evident in the sparse instrumentation, prominent bass lines, and melancholic vocals of Bristol-based bands such as Portishead and Massive Attack. Banksy, the most famous Bristol-based graffiti artist also uses few colours and covers controversial topics such as war. Robert Del Naja of Massive Attack openly declared his opposition to the Iraq War, and Banksy uses his original street art to promote alternative aspects of politics to those in the mainstream media (Blake, 2009). Alternative cultural communities now continually form in Bristol around subversive political protest, music, the consumption of healthy and organic local produce, alternative economy, sustainability, community activities and health and wellbeing. It is within this cultural scene that the members of Bristol LETS participate. This alternative cultural milieu is supportive of the alternative values and practices promoted in LETS, and is reflected in members' experiences.

Hilary for example, states that she doesn't go very much to supermarkets:

*‘Cause there’s the Southville Big Shop which is the wholefood co-op so they get wholefoods once a month and they get delivered, they used to get delivered to Faith Space which is the old church at the top of the street, a real community hub.’*

Dave also explains that:

*‘Just for the love of it’(another alternative economic scheme) is particularly popular with younger people in Bristol, particularly in places like St. Werburghs, Easton and St. Pauls where you’ve got young people who uuuuh in the 70’s they would have been called hippies, young people who are a bit alternative and who don’t sort of follow any mainstream ideas about anything at all and want to hang out with each other and be creative, and there’s a lot of that in the centre of Bristol. I’m thinking particularly St. Werburghs near the city farm where people have built their own houses. There’s a guy called Mark Eason who wrote a book called the Moneyless Man and he lives around St. Werburghs and he lived for a year without money. See Bristol is the sort of place that attracts people like this, and particularly those sort of areas, Easton, Stokes Croft, Montpellier and that central area.’*

The Dane County Timebank, which is one of the largest in the United States, also relies on the ‘alternative’ cooperative mentality of its members. Indeed, Madison’s cooperative tradition is felt to be stronger than in other cities such as Chicago and forms part of a thriving alternative and bohemian culture that pervades Downtown Madison. Cooperatives range from grocery stores to housing co-ops and worker cooperatives. The Madison Community Cooperative (MCC) operates eleven shared houses in the Downtown Madison area, and currently has over two hundred members.

One resident states that:

*‘I tried living in Beaver Dam and any time you drive fifty miles outside of Madison you’re dealing with a completely different mentality, very inhibited, very narrow minded, everybody should be the same, that kind of attitude.’*

Like Bristol, Madison is considered to be culturally diverse, influenced by a large student population, politically progressive and ideologically liberal. This is confirmed by Natalie at LGBT Books for Prisoners, who states that:

*‘One of the wonderful things about this population and this community is that there’s a lot of social awareness, even people who fall necessarily on the right are also conservationists in Wisconsin in a way that they’re not in other places in the US, but it can also feel kind of like a bubble.’*

Historically, a high level of social and political awareness also characterises the population of Madison. Residents work to maintain a tradition of subversive political action which began with ‘Fighting Bob’ La Follette and the Progressive movement: La Follette’s magazine, *The Progressive*, founded in 1909, is still published in Madison. During the late

1960s and early 1970s, thousands took part in anti-Vietnam War marches and demonstrations, with more violent incidents drawing national attention to the city. In 2011 Madison was also the site for large protests against a bill proposed by Governor Scott Walker to abolish collective bargaining for workers unions. The protests at the Capitol ranged in size from 10,000 to over 100,000 people and lasted for several months. Although these protests did not succeed in protecting workers rights, they were nevertheless an effective tool in crystallising and solidifying a highly spirited grassroots network in Madison.



*Madison from the air, photo sourced from [creativewriting.wisc.edu](http://creativewriting.wisc.edu)*

Those that are interested in social justice issues gather in Madison where they feel a sense of solidarity with others, and communities based on an alternative culture of political activism tend to form around the city. For example, Irene from LGBT Books for Prisoners, who is an activist herself, lives on Williamson St., which she describes as:

*'The liberal hippie part of town so it has lots of restaurants and lots of peace signs everywhere.'*

Stephanie also describes the Willy street neighbourhood as being:

*'Really close-knit, we talk to each other on our porches and we have food co-op a block away, I know a lot of my neighbours...people just know each other through the food co-op a lot.'*

Within several communities in Madison, alternative local cultures form around political activism, the consumption of healthy and organic local produce, alternative economic practices such as Timebanking, community activities and health and wellbeing.

The following photographs show activists protesting during April 2014 in Madison. The Solidarity Sing Along is a group that peaceably assemble and petition the government every weekday from noon-1pm outside the Capitol building. During April, the group organised a programme of activities, film showings and protests for Climate Change Week including the Climate Change Convergence March. This was attended by Larry Littlegeorge, a Native American Indian and Federation of United Tribes spokesperson, who led a tribal dance as a show of solidarity among 'white and native' tribes in the face of climate change (bottom left). This was one of many protests and Native American 'powwows' that are held regularly in the area.



*The Climate Change Convergence March in Madison, personal photos taken on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2013*

Among activist and alternative communities in Madison, a kinship is felt and enacted with the indigenous groups that occupied the land before colonisation in North America. While expressing a sense of nostalgia and anti-modernism (see page 194), these events also point to the lasting legacy left by collective expressions of Native American culture in Wisconsin, which are still actively maintained today. Here, alternative culture is maintained as individuals are moved to collectively reproduce cultural norms that have existed within the

area over a long period of time, highlighting the role of context in reproducing cultural behaviour (Bandura 1995, Elder and Ardel 1992). Taking into account its politically subversive history and strong alternative 'bohemian' culture, the residents of Madison are therefore more receptive to new ways of thinking and consuming than in other cities across the United States, and this is supportive of the DCTB and the development of Mutual Aid Networks in this area.

Finally, this section looks at the immediate cultural context of West Wales and the impact of these contextual factors on the development of Lammas. As noted by Tao, in the documentary series 'Living in the Future', the formation of Lammas was partly aided by the flourishing alternative, 'back-to-the-land' community that has long resided in West Wales. Tipi Valley in Carmarthenshire, where Tao resided for five years, is one of the largest, most alternative and long-running of these communities in the UK. It was founded in 1976 and over the years residents (200 in summer, 100 in winter) have gradually bought 200 acres of land from local farmers.

Despite the long-standing existence of Tipi Valley and their ownership of the land, the community's legal status has long been challenged. For example, Brig Oubridge, a Tipi Valley dweller since 1979, fought a thirteen-year legal battle which, after a successful court case, confirmed in 2006 his three tents and one caravan to be within the law. It is argued by Bentley (2008) that the continued existence of Tipi Valley is owed to its general acceptance by the surrounding villages where the ecovillage is considered to be part of the local economy, adding to its culture and character as a tourist attraction, and as a result, enforcement building codes against the residents are only pursued in an ad-hoc fashion.

A second important community is Brithdir Mawr in Pembrokeshire, established in 1993 when Julian Orbach, an architectural historian, and his wife Emma renovated a rundown farmhouse without planning permission or publicity and moved in with their three children. Brithdir Mawr eventually consisted of 12 adults and 10 children living in five straw bale buildings and one wooden geodesic dome. After the community was spotted from the air in 1998 and reported to the authorities, their fourteen infringements of planning regulations were resolved. This is with exception to the roundhouse built by Tony and Jane Faith which attracted international media attention, labelling Brithdir Mawr the 'Lost Tribe of Wales'. The resulting 'media storm' challenged the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park's definitions of sustainability and appropriate housing and opened the debate on low impact development in Wales. The Roundhouse story has since been instrumental in the inclusion



of the Low Impact Development policy into the Joint Unitary Development Plan for Pembrokeshire.



*Tony and Jane Faith outside their roundhouse at Brithdir Mawr, photo sourced from [www.solaripedia.com](http://www.solaripedia.com)*

West Wales is also host to the emergence of other social enterprises, building on the culture of ‘eco-living’ made popular by the media attention and legal battles fought in the area. One such enterprise is the Centre for Alternative Technology in Powys, a popular education and visitor centre demonstrating practical solutions for sustainability including environmental building, eco-sanitation, woodland management, renewable energy, energy efficiency and organic growing. As well as interactive displays, the centre runs a graduate school and residential courses, facilitating ‘second order learning’ (Seyfang, 2007) and promoting a culture of sustainable living in Wales.

Finally, the proliferation of an alternative culture in West Wales is most evident in the many festivals that are held throughout the summer months. Tao states that:

*‘We went to Sunrise Off-grid this year which was good, I mean it was good for me to connect in with the network and the people and yeah just good to have a blast really.’*

These events are an important means of sharing news and best practice in sustainable living, solidifying and growing the ecovillage movement which is connected, not only across West Wales, but also across Europe. Tao clarifies that this network includes ‘some horse-drawn people, some travellers, other people from ecovillages, other people from more urban projects’. He explains that:

*‘We know each other a lot. The whole green movement in the UK is well-linked.’*

In the following excerpt, Tao describes in more detail the way in which ecovillages and the alternative network across Europe is connected:

*P: Yeah so as well as the volunteers of which we get all sorts of people coming, there are these key kind of networker characters who come and network between all the kind of communities and projects and travel around if you like, and I find them a much more reliable source of news and information than any form of mainstream or internet media, so from them I learn ACTUALLY about what's happening on the ground in the kind of key places throughout England and throughout Europe in fact*

*C: What kind of people are they, volunteers?*

*P: They're kind of nomads if you like, and they probably do fall under the category of volunteers but they're more just like nomads*

*C: They just stay at different ecovillages?*

*P: Yeah and network in different areas, so we've just had a guy here, Magic Rob who had just been at Glastonbury so he told us all the news form there, now he's just gone off to Hungary to the Rainbow Gathering and he'll be in Hungary for a bit, and then he's down to Spain for a bit touch in with some of the groups and projects down there and then he'll be back during the winter spell and so that way you can really learn about what's happening, not just in other alternative communities but because in order to get there you transit through you know the cities and the borders, so you get a real first-hand account of how things actually are.*



*Sharing news at Ozora festival in Hungary, personal photo taken July 2013*

As shown above, alternative cultural contexts are maintained on a day to day basis by group members, and the mechanisms by which this takes place are discussed in Chapter Nine. Therefore, to conclude this broad analysis of cultural context, it could be argued that the collective expressions of culture that have dominated a certain area over time and have left a lasting legacy there, influence the initiation and maintenance of community-



economic initiatives, thus illustrating the way in which the personal, group and cultural levels of experience become linked over time.

### **3.2 Legal and Regulatory Context**

A second major influence on the selected initiatives is the legal and regulatory frameworks that they are subject to. In the case of Bristol LETS, which primarily provides practical benefits to those who are retired, unemployed or suffering from long-term illness, Government regulations surrounding care services and the provision of income support for the unemployed may have an impact on the perceived necessity for LETS among those receiving support.

In response to the increase in LETS groups in the UK during the 1990's, the Local Exchange Trading Schemes Bill was presented to the House of Commons on 25th March 1998. This Bill amended social security regulations to disregard approved exchange trading systems credits when assessing entitlement to income support, housing benefit, family credit, disability working allowance, council tax benefit and social security benefits<sup>11</sup>. LETS is not taxable, and participation does not affect entitlement to welfare provision in the UK. However, uncertainty about the legality of LETS is still widespread among non-group members, potentially limiting participation among this key sector (Williams, 2001).

In this regard, Williams (2001) argues that, more than simply allowing LETS to function alongside social welfare, local government in the UK should play a more central role in supporting these voluntary sector initiatives. In this regard, Stephen DeMeulenaere, an expert in new currencies and executive director of the Complementary Currency Resource Centre, suggests that Governments are now beginning to realise that alternative currency systems can, 'help them to do their job better by making the economy better' (CCS, 2013), and local Governments the UK have begun to show interest in the potential role of community exchange systems. Spice, in particular has received support and financial assistance from several local Councils in achieving their planned outcomes.

The regulatory structure which governs cooperatives in the United States also influences the structure and operation of Timebanks including the DCTB, as well as the way these are received by the public. In her interview, Stephanie acknowledges that although Timebanking should not be taxable, there should be a taxable avenue for mutual credit because, as she states:

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<sup>11</sup> [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk)

*'It's appropriate to pay taxes on certain transactions and supposedly some of our taxes go towards some of the things that we want to have happen, sometimes (haha) and we don't want to get into legal trouble that shuts us down so that's another practical concern there'.*

As Timebanking becomes more prominent, Government authorities increasingly attempt to regulate and tax it in the following ways:

1. Income Tax
2. Sales Tax
3. Commercial regulations
4. Zoning regulations
5. Employment law
6. Entity choice and tax exemptions
7. Regulations on currencies and financial transactions

According to Janelle Orsi of the Sustainable Economies Law Centre (2014) the International Revenue Service (IRS) in the United States considers a group that facilitates 'informal exchange of similar services on a non-commercial basis' as not subject to Federal tax regulations. However, these regulations are based on 'Private Letter Rulings' from the IRS to specific Timebanks so are not considered as Law, that is, applicable to all Timebanks. In this way, the IRS reserves the right to change the ruling on Timebank taxation. For example, the membership fees charged by Timebanks may become taxable in the future.

While the DCTB is registered a tax deductible 501c3 organisation, in the case of MANs which aim to incorporate resource sharing and pooling mechanisms, an important consideration is whether an exchange of goods will lead MAN's to become subject to taxation laws. The IRS states that if the value of the goods is measured in Hours then the transaction is tax exempt. However, if goods are bought, it is suggested that a separate reimbursement of dollars should be received (Orsi, 2014).

These complex regulations are designed to temper the activity of private profit-making industries, for example through employment laws to protect workers, consumer protection laws, health and safety laws and zoning laws to limit the reach of large corporations. However, these regulations also limit activity among those creating the 'collaborative commons', for example, volunteering three hours per week for a food coop violates employment laws, investing \$500 in a food coop violates security laws while using a garage to manage orders and distribution of goods is prohibited by zoning laws (Orsi, 2014).

In aiming to comply with Government regulations, many exchange systems in the United States tend towards formalisation and commercialisation as they are pushed into more taxable regulatory brackets (Orsi, 2014). This leads them to conform either with business or public service provisioning entities, a risk that is particularly pertinent given reports at the Madison Climate Change Convergence Talk (23 April 2014) that US credit unions industry has come under pressure through regulations that threaten their capacity to survive, with the closure of one credit union a day through merging and liquidation. This regulatory landscape has meant that only larger credit unions are able to survive through demutualization, leading them to sacrifice certain principals and adopt those of banks in order to compete.

However, alternative ownership and participatory governance is argued to, in the future, allow small cooperatives in America to navigate complex and expensive legalities that lead many to face demutualization and closure (Orsi, 2014). Orsi argues that creating a 'collaborative' economy requires a separate legal structure: laws that delineate alternative property regimes and participatory governance principles, such as those suggested by Ostrom, from the established 'market governance structures' that regulate private profit-making entities. The bylaws designed by for the DCTB and MANs will therefore be instrumental in influencing legal and regulatory contexts by creating a new legal framework to support the existence of similar models in the future.

This highlights the capacity of community-economic initiatives to produce their own rules and norms, and, through these rules, to contribute towards institutional change. This is to fully acknowledge the political embeddedness of these organizations and their institutionalizing capacity or 'agency' within the public and political spheres. This political and context embeddedness makes community-economic initiatives an appropriate means of approaching the broader institutional challenge of sustainable development.

Finally, as noted in the previous section, Lammas and the ecovillage communities of West Wales have battled to secure a more favourable regulatory environment. In 2002, the Welsh Assembly Government commissioned a report which found Low Impact Developments to be an *'intrinsically sustainable form of development, providing a possible solution to the many interconnected environmental crises we currently face'*<sup>12</sup>. Despite this,

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<sup>12</sup> University of the West of England and Land Use Consultants (2002) Low Impact Development- Planning Policy and Practice Final Report for the Countryside Council for Wales

ecovillages are rarely mentioned in planning policy across the UK, and Wales remains the only country in the UK with a national policy devoted to Low Impact Development.

Obtaining planning permission under One Planet Development regulations also remains extremely difficult, and this can prevent such developments in rural areas. For instance, Tao's first application was made in June 2007. After two refusals by Pembrokeshire County Council and a lengthy appeal process, which culminated in a court hearing, Lammas was finally granted full planning permission in August 2009 on the condition that residents make 75 percent of their income from the land within five years. However, to start a land based living is work and energy intensive and can lead to exhaustion, and together with the challenge of living and working communally, this can lead to dissolution (Halfacree, 2006; Pepper, 1991; Laughton, 2008). Thus, the five year target imposed by regulators may be considered as counterproductive as it puts unnecessary pressure on already burdened residents, and forces 'quick and easy' but (fossil) energy intensive solutions such as cement foundations for buildings and use of machinery. The impression created during interviews is that the Lammas community, in order to survive legally, is organised and managed more as a social enterprise than as a fully sustainable 'community'. This is the idea that, through hosting volunteers and running courses in how to live sustainably, the residents of Lammas 'showcase' an attractive lifestyle to those who visit the ecovillage. This, combined with other income streams, such as selling vegetables, milk and handmade products allows residents to make a living as entrepreneurs.

Another regulatory issue is that, as with the laws facing co-operatives, planning regulations and building standards are not designed with low-impact building designs and methods in mind. Van Vliet (2005) found that 'new modes of provision can be limited by regulatory frameworks designed for public provision and infused with certain notions of what constitutes a safe and efficient method of supply' (p. 93). In July 2011, Pembrokeshire County issued summons against certain Lammas residents for breaching building regulations, for example, for fire hazards, outside lavatories, the use of ladders for staircases and because some of the recycled materials and timber used for windows did not have standardised ratings recognised by inspectors. Speaking to Wales Online, Jasmine asks,

*'How can we have a mains-connected fire alarm if we have no mains? We need to start a debate about an alternative building code for low-impact homes.'*

In facing these legal and regulatory battles, the drive for personal resilience among Lammas residents may be seen as ‘anarchistic’, as Kit states. In striving for an autonomous lifestyle, residents aim to replicate the best of modern culture whilst choosing, as Tao suggests, ‘not to breathe in the poisonous air if you like’. In optimising this lifestyle choice, Lammas residents make use of sustainable technologies whilst benefitting from Government welfare provision. Kit explains that:

*‘We were in the right place at the right time in history where we could buy land at £2500 an acre, get planning permission to change it and build a house whilst being completely subsidized by the Government because of the working tax credits and the child tax credits that we get on a weekly basis that nobody else around here talks about, you know I’ve got £180 a week coming in for the three of us and no bills, I have a mobile phone bill, that’s it, so we’re poor people but we own a power station and we’ve got spring water on tap and I’m sitting on top of my fair share of the British countryside.’*

Although life at Lammas may be basic, and while Kit and his family currently live in a static caravan, their view is that in negotiating legal and regulatory issues, they will ultimately be victorious because they are, as Kit states,

*‘Living the way that is necessary in order to build the system that will allow us to live the way that we want to live.’*

### **3.3 Social Services Provision and Access to Finance**

The British ‘social services’ are described by Lewis and Greenham (2014) as being categorised by passive ‘service users’ and welfare service providers who are risk averse and target-driven. Within this context, public organisations and charities increasingly set out to ‘co-produce’ with clients, their families and neighbours, and a culture of ‘co-production’ now pervades both the public service sector and local Government (Lewis and Greenham, 2014). This change in culture recognises the flaws inherent in the one-way, expert to service-user relationship and instead attempts to unlock the assets and skills of service users.

Models based on LETS, which enable co-production, have therefore come into favour in the UK (Lewis and Greenham, 2014) and potential exists within organisations and schemes such as these for methods of community exchange that facilitate co-production. For example, Spice has responded to the need for specialist time credit designers to fulfil this ‘connecting’ role by working with 500+ organisations. Their engagement within the socio-political context of co-production within the social service sector may therefore have contributed to their success, enabling them to succeed other models which have built on LETS such as the Wiltshire Exchange Scheme.

Fitting into the broader context of social service provision is a concern in both the UK and USA for LETS and Timebanking initiatives that look to secure initial funding. Although the funding available for such projects is reported to have increased dramatically, the Collaborative Economy Lab found that insufficient funding was still one of the five main reasons for new collaborative models to fail (Anderson, 2014).

The DCTB benefitted from external financing in the initial stages of development. As a pilot project, working in partnership with the Northside Planning Council, it received financial support from a City of Madison's Neighbourhood Leadership and Capacity Building grant. In December 2014 it was also awarded the 'Brighter Futures Grant' to support the Timebank Youth court, which is State funding issued by the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families to build restorative justice and youth opportunities. At a meeting held on the 10<sup>th</sup> April 2014 to discuss funding options, separate proposals were presented for four DCTB projects as well as a proposed application for an 'Efficiencies Grant' from the Dane County.

As with voluntary sector funding in the United Kingdom, funding providers at State, Federal and County level in the United States tend to favour the large, established non-profit service providers on rolling contracts. A major difficulty lies in competing with these larger non-profits for funding, despite the DCTB becoming recognised as an established and credible social service provider. Furthermore, small profit-making businesses are reported to spring up, filling the gaps in social service delivery and pushing small non-profits further out of the market.

Like in the UK, strong competition therefore exists between non-profits in the United States and this contextual factor in turn affects the structures, processes and activities of the DCTB. For example, funding applications are tailored to match County objectives, and on receiving the Brighter Futures Grant, the DCTB is expected to deliver on these external objectives, which may distort their original focus, causing 'mission drift'. Furthermore, a move towards evidence-based and outcomes-based commissioning among funding providers, as in the United Kingdom, necessitates the use of impact assessment and financial auditing in order for the DCTB to compete for funding contracts.

As Stephanie describes, the need for MANs, *'was realising that there's no sustainable model of Timebanking and that Timebanking only fills one segment of need for individuals and the community'*. Through the Timebank Stephanie met Preston Austin, who she describes as *'someone who is really active in the open-source software world'*, and together they decided to connect open source software and principle, and open source hardware

with Timebanking and mutual credit. These ambitions for a more comprehensive economic model were only realised, however, with the support of a primary funder, who in 2009, she states, *'asked us to make a proposal to make it a project, so that's 'Time for the World''*.

With an initial \$375K one-year budget 'Time for the World' (a project of the DCTB) supported the resource and infrastructure development of Mutual Aid Networks. The three-year MAN pilot process (see page 248) aims to develop:

*'A 'kit', where essentially what we wanted to do is identify what works in what local conditions and boil it down to its essence and then figure out a way to disseminate it in a way that perpetuates itself, so if you give a kit to someone, part of how they pay for it would be to do training or translating, something that helps carry it forward... so the last year of TFTW will overlap with the 1<sup>st</sup> year of MAN, which we will work to design so each MAN will work to feed the structure that's shared by all of them, so do away with the need for an organisation that supports it other than the one that springs forward from it.'*

The kit for the MAN includes an outline of the organisation structure, bylaws, articles of the corporation, processes for project facilitation and a detailed budget template including instructions and technical assistance for replacing monetary needs with in-kind, shared resources or Hour-based resources. Through reciprocal processes, MANs thus aim to gradually replace a reliance on external sources of funding with a regenerative sharing network. However, in order to achieve this final goal, the MAN pilot process will seek a 3-year seed budget to be turned into a self-sustaining pool using these methods.

Finally, Lammas has also benefited from external funding in the initiation phase of the project. In December 2009 it won a £346,935 award from the Department of Energy and Climate Change for the construction of the Community Hub building and work started in January 2013. This evidence points to the important role of national and local Government funding as well as networking between intermediary organisations to provide essential financial stimulus for the initiation of sustainable enterprise such as these grassroots community-economic initiatives.

### **3.4 Technological Influences**

The emerging context of currency innovation is also a technological one. With keen support from Government funders, think tanks such as the New Economics Foundation, and international agencies such as Qoin and NESTA, young professionals work to create a myriad of socio-technological innovations to build the 'new economy' in light of the 2008 financial crisis. In a recent report by NESTA (Nov 2014) it is estimated that the alternative finance industry, which includes peer-to-peer lending, community shares and

crowdfunding, has more than doubled in size each year from £267 million in 2012 to £666 million in 2013 to £1.74 billion in 2014. Bitcoin, Ripple, Litecoin, Peercoin, Darkcoin, NXT coin and Dogecoin are the most capitalised and widely used digital currencies today, and the suggestion is that mutual credit currencies such as LETS 'Ideals' may benefit from the blockchain technology employed by digital online currencies.

Other technological innovations include Bristol Pound's TXT2Pay system (developed by Qoin) which enables payments to be made and received using a mobile phone. This technology is shared with the Totnes Pound and Chantelle Norton, speaking at the Guild of Independent Currencies<sup>13</sup>, comments:

*'Since the re-launch of the Totnes Pound in May, we have seen a resurgence of interest in the local currency with 90 percent of businesses in the High Street now using them, we are delighted that we now have an electronic version which we will greatly increase its use and benefit to the local independent traders.'*

Having the ability to use an alternative currency online is therefore found to greatly increase the volume of transactions that are made using local currency.

Shared open-source software programs are also widely adopted by LETS and Timebanks, the largest being the South Africa-based 'Community Exchange Systems' developed by Matthew Slater, which hosts 50,000 (more or less active) users, in 600 LETS and time bank projects worldwide. In this global LETS and Timebank database, each group has its own currency and manages its own credit limits which enables local sovereignty, yet the shared infrastructure means that transactions are possible between communities across the globe. These large-scale systems show how innovations that were popularised by cryptocurrencies are increasingly being employed in the global community currency field. Further research is needed, however, to determine the level of trading that occurs between groups and internationally (DeMeulenaere, 2013). Nevertheless, the impact of technology in Bristol LETS was made clear by Hilary at Bristol LETS who states that:

*'Before it went online LETS was very stretched and Karaline was trying to hold it all together...it was kind of looking a bit rocky at that stage (.) must have been about 2010-11. It's got a lot stronger since we've gone online and opened up to the whole of Bristol.'*

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<sup>13</sup> [www.guildofindependentcurrencies.org/totnes-goes-electronic](http://www.guildofindependentcurrencies.org/totnes-goes-electronic)



### 3.5 Academic Context

The final socio-political context to take into consideration is the role of academic institutions. In a review of the literature on complementary currencies, Shroeder (2011) states that:

*'An infrastructure developed in Britain which proved to be supportive of the advancement both of community currencies and of academic reflection of this movement.'* (p.36)

Speaking at the launch of the Guild of Independent Currencies, Professor Bendell also suggests that alternative currencies are increasingly being seen as an emerging profession, and this relies on the support of Universities to build a practical and relevant knowledge base. To this end, the Institute for Leadership and Sustainability at the University of Cumbria, of which Prof. Bendell is Director, offers a master's level course in 'Sustainable Exchange' and a 'Postgraduate Certificate in Sustainable Leadership' that is payable in Bitcoins. This, along with the work of the NEF in producing rigorous data that challenges current economic thinking, places the United Kingdom at the forefront of innovation and thinking in social and economic sustainability.

However, research which is to usefully inform experimentation within the community currency field must address questions that are focused, pragmatic and technical, and therefore by their very nature collaborative and interdisciplinary. For example, Shroeder (2011) finds that authors who have developed an expertise in the field, that is, have published 10+ papers, retain a focus on the object of their analysis (community currencies), while authors who are primarily interested in a single theoretical or disciplinary lens ultimately do not face the criticism of a community of currency developers and practitioners who are experts in the field. Stephanie (Community Currency Magazine, 2012) also states that:

*'It's about getting people involved where they are at, which is very seldom in the academic or economics arena. Focusing on working with people to solve problems and achieve goals in their communities is something that I think can be unleashed now. And again, it's more of a communication and education effort than anything else.'*

This statement indicates that practitioners of new socio-technological innovations such as community-economic initiatives rely on academic research that is practical, pragmatic and conducted in collaboration with practitioners working on the ground. Research that remains purely theoretical and detached from the innovation in question is not likely to have an impact among those to whom the research is most likely to be relevant. This is

because, as Seyfang and Smith (2015) suggest, the cycles of innovation that determine the development of grassroots innovations are characterised initially by practical and pragmatic knowledge sharing between actors in different regions, resulting in a 'stable institutional field'.

The current study therefore includes two complementary research questions, the first focussing on group members themselves in order to have wide academic relevance, and the second offering a practical and pragmatic evaluation of the groups in question, with the aim of having impact, not only within academia but among practitioners on the ground and within the wider field. This demonstrates how the work of practitioners working on social innovations is influenced by the direction of progress in academic research, and also how such research, in order to remain relevant, is influenced by the work of practitioners. Again, this interaction echoes Heidegger's emphasis on intersubjectivity and the 'person-in-context' (Smith et al. 2009). The specific contribution of this type of investigation to the field of sustainability research, and of this study in pioneering such an approach, is discussed further in the following concluding chapter.

#### **4. Discussion: Influence of Contextual Factors**

This section discusses the contexts outlined above and their proposed influence on the social movements in question. First, the cultural context within particular geographic areas is argued to influence the translation of these movements across the world. This is because cultural conditions act as a selection environment for new innovations (Raven, 2012). For example, in Madison the conditions provided by a strong bohemian culture and grassroots network act as a selection environment that is found to support the development of Mutual Aid Networks in the area. Community-economic initiatives may therefore be most easily developed within similar cultural contexts, where gaining the trust and understanding of citizens is easiest. This type of market selection is highlighted by the Collaborative Consumption Laboratory who state with regard to peer-to-peer businesses that 'the loyalty and respect of the community may even be higher stakes than the actual regulatory changes these companies seek' (Anderson, 2014).

An important point to make with regard to cultural context is that LETS and Timebanking work with existing structures and, as social models that can be overlaid onto any culturally receptive urban or rural community, they are more compatible with the dominant regime and therefore more easily translated (Seyfang and Smith, 2015). The ecovillage model, on the other hand, requires a more drastic structural change in housing design and policy to

become truly influential as a model for sustainability. As discussed in the previous chapter, the inclusion of alternative exchange systems within ecovillages could therefore be instrumental in their diffusion by making them centres of innovation in sustainable economy.

Scaling up of LETS and Timebanks is found to be influenced by social services provision in the UK and USA. Competitiveness within this sector involves conducting regular social audits and impact analyses in order to prove value and win funding contracts. While this may result in mission-drift, Spice Time Credits has successfully scaled up to include 500+ members through collaboration within the social services sector. Envisaging community currency initiatives as 'connectors', facilitating reciprocal non-monetary exchange between voluntary organisations may enable their scaling-up and better integration within existing structures. However, as demonstrated by the DCTB, a 'shared vision' between collaborating organisations is essential.

Finally, prevailing economic conditions influence the translation of these movements, where poorer communities such as the Welsh community of Blaengarw (section 2.1), and those in the undeveloped South are found to be more receptive to the use of community currencies. Indeed, these initiatives have proven to be successful tools for community development and economic empowerment in Africa. Following the success of the Bangla-Pesa and the recently-launched Gatina-Pesa currencies in Kenya, 'Grassroots Economics' an NGO founded by Will Ruddick is to launch two community currencies in South Africa in coordination with the University of Cape Town's Environmental Economics Policy Research Unit. However, community-economic initiatives in both developed and undeveloped regions are found to rely on external sources of funding, particularly in the initiation phase of the project as indicated by grants received by Spice and the DCTB. With regard to the ecovillage model, Lammas residents also report significant reliance on Government welfare to support their subsistence. However, in a survey of five ecovillages across Europe, Slater found that 60 percent of income came from private grants and donations, with 36 percent from subletting, 18 percent from tourism and only 4.5 percent from Government support<sup>14</sup>. Significant private investment is therefore required to engage in ecovillage life which could influence the replication of these initiatives in less economically developed regions.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://matslats.net/ecovillage-tour-conclusion>

A final contextual influence of importance to all three movements is the creation of a 'knowledge commons' by practitioners working locally, internationally and within academia. While this type of 'trans-local learning' (Berkana, see page 60) was not available in the early diffusion of LETS, perhaps limiting its innovation, it is found to be instrumental in the more successful diffusion of Timebanking. Lammas is the only initiative of the three to publish academic research online and offer training courses to the public. This type of collaborative interdisciplinary research, disseminated between groups and practitioners, allows knowledge and best practice to be translated into novel contexts, thereby informing experimentation and progress within the movement.

## **5. Chapter Summary**

This chapter has discussed the LETS, Timebanking and Ecovillage movements in terms of three processes: replication, scaling-up and translation. Both successful and unsuccessful approaches to the expansion of these movements were outlined. In particular, the high rate of failure among initiatives in all three movements evidences the need for many small community groups to operate in a connected fashion, and to learn from each other through the development of a co-ordinated 'knowledge commons'. Section four identified the external, contextual factors most influencing the development and diffusion of these movements. They are the cultural context, legal and regulatory context, social services and access to finance, whether public or private, as well as the technological and academic context of which this research is a part. The current chapter concludes the results presented in this thesis and these findings will be discussed further in the next and final chapter, the concluding discussion.

## Chapter Twelve

### Concluding Discussion

#### 1. Introduction

This final chapter draws together the findings and outlines the concluding argument of the thesis. It also evaluates the research conducted and discusses its implications and relevance to the study of environmental behaviour change in the developed West. It concludes that despite some limitations, these findings provide a useful contribution to social science debates on the development of sustainable community and economic models for the future.

The focus of this study has been on 'community-economic initiatives' as a vehicle for individual behaviour change. The chosen initiatives were Bristol LETS, the Dane County Timebank and Lammas Ecovillage. These unique groups, which act as exemplars to society at large, are a novel subject for research in this field (Horton, 2006). They are part of an evolving social experiment in sustainability in which alternative socio-economic structures are being created at the grassroots (Seyfang, 2010).

By documenting the motivations and experiences of group members, this study informs the design of structures and processes that might better accommodate members' experiences. These understandings also inform the diffusion of such models so that the wider population may similarly engage in more sustainable lifestyles. This study therefore provides practical data to group leaders as well as contributing towards theory development.

To this end, the study has addressed two primary research questions:

1. *How do members understand their experience within the selected groups?*
2. *What processes lead to the formation, maintenance and contraction of these groups?*

The following two sections situate the findings of each research question within the literature. Section four discusses the implications of this study both for the practical advancement of these organisations and for the advancement of theory. Section five addresses the strengths, limitations and challenges of conducting this research including a

focus on interdisciplinary approach taken. Finally, section six summarises the chapter and concludes the thesis.

## **2. Linking Group Members' Experiences to the Literature**

Chapters Seven to Nine asked: *How do members understand their experience within the selected groups?* The goal of IPA is to distil a 'generalized' human experience and so this part of the study outlined phenomenological experiences that were common to members across all three groups. These chapters demonstrated the experiential journey, psychological changes and value shifts that led interviewees to adopt a more sustainable lifestyle.

### **2.1 Personal Experiences**

In Chapter Seven, the primary motivation for engagement is described as being a drive for 'personal resilience', satisfied by practices that meet members' practical and emotional needs as well as the ideological motivation to live in a manner that they consider to be morally upright. These findings may be explored in terms of psychological motivation. In Maslow's (1943) model of human motivation introduced in Chapter Two, the reciprocal practices conducted by group members express intrinsic, other-focussed goals of affiliation, generativity and personal development, which are associated with greater health, well-being and performance (Vansteenkiste *et al.* 2003). Pursuing these intrinsic goals is shown to result in more ecologically sustainable behaviours among group members such as sharing resources and living a low impact lifestyle (Brown and Kasser, 2005).

A key finding is therefore that group members are motivated by intrinsic rather than extrinsic goals. In this regard, Deci and Ryan's (2002) three intrinsic needs for self-determination: autonomy, competence and relatedness may be seen to motivate participation within community-economic initiatives. The realisation of autonomy from state and market provision is experienced by group members as a feeling of empowerment, or enhanced personal agency (Bandura, 1989). Meaningfulness, for group members, also involves rejecting societal standards of success, in favour of existential understandings of what it means to lead a good and successful life. Consumer goods and extrinsic monetary rewards are also, on the whole, rejected by group members in favour of authentic expression, which contributes towards an experience of autonomy from socially prescribed meanings.

As noted in Chapter Two, being motivated by extrinsic rewards undermines the intrinsic motivation for competence and relatedness (Vohs and Goode, 2006). Collective sustainable behaviours such as growing and making one's own food at Lammas, or conducting exchanges at Bristol LETS and the DCTB build a sense of community with those who share common values. These practices contribute towards the experience of competence and relatedness among group members, promoting well-being and ecological sustainability (Kasser, 2009). Indeed, the phenomenological experience of 'meaningfulness' in giving and receiving is reported by group members as being heartfelt and joyful, pointing to an experience of satisfaction as a result of group membership. These findings suggest that environmental behaviour change, as part of a sustainability agenda, requires policy frameworks that encourage individuals to pursue intrinsic goals that result in personal and collective resilience within groups, rather than policies that encourage individual consumers to pursue extrinsic rewards (Kasser, 2009).

But what leads group members to embark on this path? For several interviewees, transformative moments during their life-course led to strong moral judgements that were imbued with existential significance, enhancing personal agency and leading to dramatic changes in their behaviour. For Leanne, the transformative moment came, as she states, *'in Tesco's buying some carrots and looking at them in a plastic bag and thinking, this is mad, I want somewhere to grow my carrots at some stage.'* The aim of research into these significant life experiences, as Tanner (1998) writes,

*'Is for environmental educators, to the degree feasible, replicate those experiences in the education of the young' (p. 365).*

However, this type of experience is only reported by 34 percent of environmentalists (Palmer, 1993), and a 'green' upbringing or spending time outdoors also does not necessarily result in pro-environmental action, suggesting that these complex experiences cannot reliably be 'induced' through environmental education and time outdoors.

These findings indicate that quantitative research which aims to 'predict' these events is perhaps unable to capture the complexity of the experiences and contexts that lead to pro-environmental behaviour (Hungerford and Volk, 1990). Instead, focussing on participants' inner cognitive states using IPA methods provides evidence of 'existential thinking' among group members. This finding suggests that the tendency to engage with the ultimate concerns of life and death may be a pre-requisite, when faced with a moral injustice, to experience a strong moral reaction or learning experience that sets a moral precedent for

ones' life-course. Importantly, instead of leading to apathy, group members' tendency towards existential thinking leads them to also hold a strong 'belief in themselves', that is, they are empowered by strong self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997).

'Sensory participation in nature', resulting in a strong 'spiritual' sense of place was also expressed by Lammas residents, in line with research into 'environmental sensitivity' (Hungerford and Volk, 1990). A small number of robust experimental studies have demonstrated the positive psychological effects of direct exposure to nature (Mayer, et al. 2009; Wells, 2002; Kaplan, 1995), however the literature in this area fails to ask 'How?' nature is experienced and what this might contribute to understandings of 'nature connectedness' (Schultz, 2002). This study supports an eco-phenomenological approach that prioritises sensory and bodily experience. By placing the body within a living landscape and actively engaging with it, changes in perception were found to result in a change of awareness and changes in attitude. As attention is directed toward the non-human world, perceptions and moral attitudes are found to reflect this orientation.

Peterson (1982) described environmental sensitivity as 'a set of affective attributes which result in an individual viewing the environment from an empathetic perspective' (1982, p. 5). Empathy with an alive and conscious natural world has been demonstrated in children (Bullock, 1985), however evidence for this experience among adults remains controversial (Goodpaster, 1978; McDaniel, 1983; Naess, 1973). Nevertheless, Tao's practice of *'really trying to listen to the trees when you're planting them'*, suggests that living and participating in nature may help to retain the 'environmental sensitivity' experienced during childhood. Stephanie's experience of helping the disadvantaged through the DCTB similarly locates her outside of the mainstream economy as she instead participates within her local community through non-monetary transactions (Eisenberg and Strayer, 1987). *Participating* in such a way within a local natural environmental and within a local community is found to play an important role in promoting both sensitivity to others and 'environmental sensitivity'.

The empathy that results from participation within the selected groups is described by some members as a 'spiritual' experience, however it also has practical social and environmental policy implications. For example, reciprocity resulting from the experience of empathy is the foundation for many of the alternative economic models suggested in Chapter Three, such as the 'sharing economy' (Shor, 2014) and the core economy (Gibson-Graham 2006; Lewis and Greenham, 2014).



## 2.2 Group Experiences

Second, group membership was understood as a 'community' experience. Interviewees expressed kinship with ancestral tribes, nostalgia for a type of community that they no longer feel is present in modern society, and the motivation to participate within community exchange practices characteristic of pre-industrial society (Henri and Pudelko, 2003). Driven to enhance personal resilience, group membership was often initiated with the aim of giving and receiving social support, especially among the most vulnerable members, as one LETS member confirms, *'that's not what it's about (credits), it's about the fact that really you're doing it for the community, you're doing it for helping each other'*. Because the supportive platforms provided by LETS and the DCTB support individuals both old and young, and are maintained by their contributions, they are argued to be more conducive to healthy community relations than informal friendship groups.

As outlined in Chapter Three, cognitive mechanisms for reciprocity enable cooperative exchange. This is because, instead of enabling individuals to act rationally on uncertain and abstract information, they work to maintain stable group dynamics between individuals within community groups (Cosmides and Tooby, 2004). However, this evidence relies on experimental public goods games, which lack the experiential insight that IPA is able to contribute (Fehr and Gächter, 2000, Yamagishi, 1986).

The current findings are able to add ecologically valid phenomenological insights to the growing field of neuroeconomics by providing evidence of group members' preference for engaging in direct or 'informal' reciprocity over more formal exchange processes (Lietaer, 2001). This preference is clear as LETS and DCTB members prefer 'direct swaps' and often forget to record their hours online. This common tendency towards informalising transactions supports experimental evidence for the social function of reciprocity, this being that punitive and pro-reward sentiments towards others, established through informal reciprocity, work to establish a stable group dynamic (Cosmides and Tooby, 2004; Fehr and Gächter, 2000, Yamagishi, 1986). More formal exchange mechanisms characteristic of the market economy on the other hand, may deprive individuals of the phenomenological and *emotional* experience of interdependence associated with informal reciprocity. Further research could explore in more depth the psychological processes by which informal reciprocity affects group dynamics within LETS and Timebanks in comparison to more formal community-based exchange processes. For example, cognitive aspects such as members' sentiments towards others, their rate of participation and their

self-interest in the group goal may impact upon group success differently in formal and informal exchange contexts (Wilson, 2013; Cosmides and Tooby, 2004).

Family life was also found to influence sustainable community behaviour in complex ways. Living a sustainable and low-impact lifestyle such as that at Lammas does not ensure a high level of community connection because, as Tao states, this depends on '*voluntary give, good will*'; which is corroborated by reports from Sieben Linden and other ecovillages. Technological platforms for community support, such as in the LETS and DCTB communities, on the other hand, were found to provide a higher level of emotional support to vulnerable and elderly members, highlighting the role of contextual factors such as social service provision and access to finance as outlined in Chapter Eleven.

### **2.3 Cultural Experiences**

Third, group membership was understood as a cultural expression and indeed, was found to be just one part of interviewees' wider cultural identities. Identities alternative to the 'mainstream' often stemmed from transformative moments in the lives of members (Hards, 2011) and upbringing also influenced cultural selection in all three groups, whether by setting a moral precedent or inspiring members to take a different path. By documenting the process by which such experiences lead to significant changes in individuals' life courses, these findings add to the literature on Significant Life Experiences. In particular, empathy for the suffering of others was expressed by several interviewees and may be associated with group membership, also providing evidence for the role of empathy in 'environmental sensitivity' (Hungerford and Volk, 1990).

Second, alternative cultural networks are maintained by group members on a daily basis through processes of cultural identity positioning. This corroborates the findings of Social Identity Theory, which state that conformity is driven by social identification with a group, which enhances pride and self-esteem (Sleeboos *et al.*, 2006), while rejection leads to depression and withdrawal of efforts towards the group goal (Tyler and Blader, 2003; Smith *et al.*, 2007). Constructing a positive group identity among peers was indeed found to be a concern among group members, sometimes over and above environmental concerns. This was achieved by some by taking on responsible administrative, organisational or leadership roles within the group. Co-ordinating or participating in local grassroots events, using 'green' vocabulary and verbally reacting against mainstream culture all work to establish an identity as somebody who is knowledgeable within the alternative culture. Furthermore, outward expressions of moral virtue or knowledge and expertise allows members to

mutually verify their identity, not only as a moral citizen, but one that is appreciated or respected within the group, and this identity affirmation appears to result in feelings of pride, increased self-esteem and belonging.

Identification with these alternative cultural groups also relates to groups members' expressions of authenticity, as noted in Chapter Seven. Drawing on the work of Heidegger, a phenomenologist and major thinker on the concept of existential authenticity, Steiner and Reisinger (2006) write:

*'If people project an authentic self, if they turn a unique spotlight on the world, they bring to light unique possibilities. If they project a "they-self", a conformist self, then they bring to light only common, shared possibilities. The decision to be authentic or not is taken in the existential moment, in the moment of fundamental self-understanding, not in a psychological or behavioural moment when one decides how to respond to an experience or what to do.'* (p. 306)

Projecting self-identities that are 'existentially authentic' has implications at a cultural level. For example, in selecting cultural values and styles, Wang (1996) considers the authentic self to:

*'Emerge as an ideal that acts to resist or invert the dominant rational order of the mainstream institutions in modernity. To resist the inauthenticity stemming from the mainstream order, the authentic self is often thought to be more easily realized or fulfilled in the space outside the dominant institutions, a space with its cultural and symbolic boundaries which demarcate the profane from the sacred (Graburn 1989), responsibilities from freedom, work from leisure, and the inauthentic public role from the authentic self. As a result, nature, for example, is seen as typical of such a space.'* (p. 361)

The decision among Lammas residents to construct unique dwellings within the remote natural surroundings of West Wales, may in this sense be an attempt to regain a sense of personal authenticity from the mainstream order, to gain in self-understanding and even to experience 'the sacred'.

Finally, this study highlights the phenomenological importance of location in both selecting and rejecting cultural influences, contributing to the literature on Social Practice Theory (Wenger, 2006). The cultural contexts of Bristol, Madison and West Wales all support grassroots networks, while the physical seclusion of Lammas separates members from mainstream cultural influences. Kasser (2009) suggests that the experience of living in ecologically sustainable (vs. degraded) environments is conducive to self-actualisation, supported by Tao's description of the way in which being interwoven with the land is nourishing to the 'soul'. Although the decision to relocate to Lammas and 'construct' a

culture there involves significant personal agency, in contrast, members of Bristol LETS and DCTB actively select their alternative cultural influences on a daily basis, involving a different 'scope and focus of personal agency' (Bandura, 1997). In these circumstances, adherence to a 'group identity' is an important way to maintain their identification against mainstream cultural influences. According to Social Identity Theory, once a cultural group is incorporated into ones' self-identity, it becomes ones' perspective, and one relates this frame of reference to all new situations encountered. In this way, group membership is argued to reinforce the moral ideologies of group members (Mead, 1934; Simon *et al.*, 1995).

### **3. Linking Group Processes to the Literature**

Chapters Ten and Eleven focussed on Research Question Two: *What processes lead to the formation, maintenance and contraction of these initiatives?* As noted in the introduction, groups were selected at different points in their development: Lammas being in its formative phase, the DCTB negotiating its maintenance and expansion, and LETS in a contraction phase or plateau.

First, processes leading to the formation of community-economic initiatives differed between the chosen groups, with various contributing factors outlined in Chapter Ten. An important factor in both Lammas and the DCTB was the initial motivation of the group champion, whether to create 'a culture based on peace and love' or a 'fractally' structured community that can meet its many needs through reciprocal exchange. Variation in the group goal was, as suggested in Chapter Three, found to inform the degree and nature of reciprocal exchange and community-building practice among members. When the group goal is explicitly 'environmental' as in Lammas, rather than 'social' as in the DCTB, different punitive and pro-reward sentiments appear to be activated among members. For example, individualism is promoted in Lammas as group sentiments are motivated towards environmental instead of social goals. This finding contributes towards theoretical understandings relating to the cognitive mechanism for reciprocity and its' activation within groups. Further research is needed to explore the relationship between the group goal and differing punitive and pro-reward sentiments (Fehr and Gächter, 2000; Kurzban *et al.*, 2001), and the implications of this for sustainable development at the grassroots. Divergence between the groups indicates that this line of inquiry may be fruitful, particularly as 'the group goal' is crucial to Ostroms core design principles, which work to sustain collective group action towards a common goal (Cox, 2010).

With regard to the processes that maintain the chosen initiatives, these findings contribute to ongoing work by Seyfang and Longhurst, (2014) and Utting (2015) on the diffusion of Grassroots Innovations and Social and Solidarity Economy, work that has gained international recognition through the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (Smith, forthcoming).

In maintaining these groups, community leadership involves negotiating challenges and competing for funding contracts within changing socio-political and regime contexts (Orsi, 2014; Seyfang and Longhurst, 2014). A major challenge identified in Bristol LETS and the DCTB is that members often forget to record their hours online, suggesting that an online currency system may hinder or detract from the 'spirit of the gift' that drives exchanges. Monetary history states that money was used in ancient times, not between community members but to conduct transactions with passing merchants in situations of risk (Graeber 2011). As credit money now governs the majority of transactions, including those in Bristol LETS and DCTB, the need to build trust by seeing and talking to one another in order to discern risk and intentionality is argued to have diminished as part of economic exchange (Vohs and Goode, 2006). Again, as noted in Chapter Three, evidence suggests that the use of credit as part of a formal gift mechanism may conflict with group members' cognitive mechanisms for reciprocity (Leitaer, 2001), and this is supported by the first-hand experiences described during interview. These findings indicate that, instead, informal reciprocity supports the emotional experience of 'reciprocal interdependence' associated with group membership (Gregory, 1982).

However, the formal use of credits satisfies three of Elinor Ostrom's core design principles for groups that manage common-pool resources: it provides a clearly defined boundary, a means of recording costs and rewarding members, and a cost-effective means of monitoring the commons to avoid free riding (Wilson *et al*, 2013). In Bristol LETS and the DCTB, time credits provide a community platform that supports regular trading between up to 150 members regardless of membership numbers, supporting the socio-psychological role of direct reciprocity in maintaining a stable group dynamic (Cosmides and Tooby, 2004). Spice Time Credits, on the other hand, has succeeded in fulfilling a connecting role among UK social service organisations, connecting 800 individuals and 75 organisation members through formal exchange processes. This indicates that formal credit exchanges in the UK and USA may be best applied in person-to-agency, rather than in community contexts (Lewis and Greenham, 2014). These findings inform the development of Mutual

Aid Networks as a means of scaling-up cooperative mutual credit, as well as suggesting a tentative explanation for the contraction seen in LETS.

The two research questions that constitute this thesis show how the phenomenological experiences of individuals (personal, group and cultural experiences) shape social phenomena. Equally, they show how social and organisational phenomena are experienced by individual members. Attempting to understand social phenomena only through the perspective of individuals fails to illustrate the way in which personal experiences coalesce into group cultures and larger social movements, that is, how these evolving patterns relate to social change. Equally, attempting to understand social phenomena only through a group or 'system' perspective, that is, analysing social relations from an organisational level, fails to illustrate how those social structures and processes are meaningfully experienced by the individuals that form them, as well as how they originate from, and are sometimes purposefully created by those individuals.

A multi-level approach which includes both a phenomenological and systemic analysis allows these findings to usefully inform each other, providing a form of triangulation that enhances the validity of the findings. It also promotes the practical application of these results in both an academic and organisational context. Findings relating to Research Question One apply to a wide academic audience looking to understand the motivations and experiences of those engaged in sustainable alternative economic practices, with the aim that by understanding the motivation to live sustainably, these practices may be replicated in society at large (Horton, 1996). Findings relating to Research Question Two will be of interest, not only to sustainability researchers, but also to those working within the social movements studied, such as activists, group leaders and researchers working in the field of community currencies and grassroots innovation.

#### **4. Implications and Further Research**

The findings outlined in sections two and three have the following practical and policy implications for promoting local sustainability.

##### **4.1 Personal Resilience within Needy Communities**

First, a primary motivation to participate within the selected initiatives was to enhance personal resilience and meet immediate personal needs. Because, among group members, these needs also apply to the broader issue of sustainability, this finding has important

implications for the development of sustainable social models, how these may be marketed and where in society they may be applied.

Although income data was not disclosed, occupational data as well as group observation and interview data indicates that members in all three groups tend to fall into mid-range socio-economic groups, with members of the Allied Drive neighbourhood being the most disadvantaged in this study. Several members were also found to be marginalised due to ill health or other personal circumstances. Groups such as Bristol LETS, Lammas and the DCTB may therefore provide empowerment, through autonomy and reciprocity, to those who may experience disenfranchisement, whether this may be for personal, financial or health reasons. From this evidence, along with participants' interview transcripts and group observation, it may be suggested that a relationship may exist between socio-economic conditions and the agency associated with enhancing personal resilience.

This finding has important implications for the development of sustainable social models. Rather than being implemented from above, they emerge from the communities that they serve, and so the experience of personal agency among members is an essential element in the continued and effortful maintenance of these networks. Evidence from the DCTB and Bristol LETS in particular indicates that social and economic necessity motivates members with a sense of collective responsibility for each other's welfare, resulting in an active and purposeful coordination of voluntary welfare provision within communities.

Although marginalised communities may be limited in their capacity to affect large-scale social change, their agency and heightened receptivity to the ideals of eco-communalism—simplicity, self-sufficiency and local sustainability, has consequences for developing community-economic initiatives (Raskin *et al.* 2002). For example, at the Climate Change Convergence talk held in Madison on the 23rd April 2014, it was stated by a guest speaker that:

*'People who have less money have always had to be creative about how their needs are met, and we can learn from them.'*

The success of Spice indicates the potential of engaging 'the many' who suffer social and economic need and equally, the Lammas ecovillage model provides an opportunity to those like Kit, who states that, *'in reality I'm never going to be able to earn enough money doing something I'd like to do to have a fine selection of wine and have a fine selection of cheeses'*, to maintain a sustainable and low-cost lifestyle for their families. Each plot of land at Lammas was bought for an average of £21,000, leaving no mortgage or bills to pay,

whilst residents' lifestyles are 'subsidised by the Government'. Kit therefore comments that *'we're poor people but we own a power station and we've got spring water on tap and I'm sitting on top of my fair share of the British countryside'*.

These findings suggest that community-economic initiatives may be most effective when maintained by those who are motivated to make sustainable lifestyle choices that enhance their own resilience against hardship in terms of health, financial economy and energy saving. For example, through the DCTB Front Yard Gardens Program members use their front gardens to collectively grow fresh, healthy food, through Maxine's Timebank Store members are able to exchange used clothes and household goods for Timebank Hours, and the Allied Drive Energy Project members support each other in saving energy as well as money on their electricity bills. In the absence of a profit motive and the experience of agency associated with wealth accumulation, this non-growth thinking and working model may be most easily translated in areas where economic conditions support a strong grassroots movement for personal and collective resilience. Importantly, this finding accounts for the socio-structural conditions that influence the experience of agency among group members as they engage in collective sustainable behaviour.

#### **4.2 Options for engaging with Mainstream and Alternative Cultures**

Second, membership within Bristol LETS, Lammas and the DCTB forms part of group members' wider cultural identity. This cultural understanding of group membership has implications for the initiation of these community-economic initiatives within more mainstream Western contexts. The groups studied here were found to exist within the context of a strong grassroots network and cooperative culture and not only do they provide members with personal resilience, but are also a means of expressing cultural identities based on the ethical values of anti-consumerism and social justice.

In LETS and the DCTB alternative cultures are selected to differing degrees by members who remain relatively independent from one another as they continue to engage with mainstream systems in their daily lives. Lammas, on the other hand is an 'intentional' community model that is necessarily separated from mainstream society, where members create a culture that 'enacts what sustainability really looks like'. Lammas is therefore fundamentally different to the other organisations particularly as their remit to live 75 percent sustainably results in greater physical interdependence and the need for stronger community relations between group members.



The benefits and difficulties of engaging, in a truly interdependent way, with one's immediate community are experimented with at Lammas, and this points to the role of ecovillages as 're-learning' centres for 'tribal' community in the West, where skills such as conflict resolution and 'empathetic listening' may be developed and applied in new contexts (Raven, 2012). New consensus decision-making models such as the N Street Method and Holacracy, which encourage democracy and empathetic connection between group members, are increasingly being applied to corporate work environments and organisations of all kinds.

These alternative models for social organisation are developed within ecovillages and translated into 'mainstream society'. In Lammas, bottom-up approaches to community building which begin with establishing the physical structures for community and growing individual friendships through reciprocity and needs-based empathy may be applied to other community-economic initiatives instead of top-down approaches. This lesson is already observed in Stephanie's empathetic engagement with communities in Madison and her use of resource distribution games within those communities. Further research could test the effectiveness and impact of these methods, which have been developed in ideal experimental conditions, that is, within cooperative communities 'enacting' sustainable society in the West.

Equally, the residents of Lammas are able to engage with mainstream residents in the surrounding area by portraying the principles of comfort, convenience, individualism, enterprise and fossil fuel use, thereby translating ecovillage life as desirable by modern standards. Neighbours who aspire to the collective identity promoted by Lammas, appear to be driven by the desire for acceptance and recognition by the group (Stets and Carter, 2012; Mackie *et al.*, 2000; Smith *et al.* 2007; Turner *et al.*, 1987). Building on these identity processes, evidence from Findhorn suggests that neighbours may be encouraged to establish cooperatives and social enterprises of their own which may be of value to the Lammas Low Impact Living Initiative, thereby establishing multiple centres of initiative and growing the ecovillage. As demonstrated by Findhorn's Ekopia, including an alternative credit union provides the means for residents and the surrounding community to trade independently with each other in a sustainable way. Further research could explore the psychological processes identified in this study, so that they may be better supported and applied to scale-up other community-economic models aiming to become a 'bridge to the mainstream'. Mutual credit initiatives such as Bristol LETS and the DCTB, on the other hand,

might look to engage further with the professions, markets, media, and spaces that constitute alternative cultural networks.

Bristol LETS for example, despite evidence of contraction, remains appealing to a mature and culturally alternative demographic characterised by ideological perspectives and reduced agency compared to the younger DCTB sample. The benefits enjoyed by Bristol LETS members may therefore be enhanced, not by aiming to capture a wider membership, but through better tailoring the Bristol LETS platform towards a more mature demographic through activities offering social support, belonging and enhanced personal resilience. Skills development and social change activities on the other hand are more effectively provided by other Bristol-based initiatives such as 'Just for the Love of It', which are able to attract a younger membership base.

Bernard Lietaer points to the benefits of "bespoke" currencies applying to specific niches in society, at a neighbourhood, town and city level (Lietaer, 2001). However, the major risk identified in this study of groups that apply to specific 'niches' in society is that they then tend to be maintained by a specific demographic of individuals. For example, elderly members who have been 'taken out of their normal functioning' in Bristol LETS, or people interested in social justice issues in the DCTB. The consequence of an elderly demographic may be that group members' requests are not met by corresponding offers, leading to stagnation in the group. Similarly, Natalie at the DCTB comments that:

*'Madison's the big hub, and that can feel a little bit claustrophobic sometimes to me... I know that there are a lot of people who are community minded and for various social justice causes... so that's one of the wonderful things about this population and this community is that there's a lot of social awareness but it can also feel kind of like a bubble, yeah.'*

The consequence of the niche cultural demographic in Madison is that group members may find themselves 'preaching to the converted' instead of expanding the movement, as Natalie continues,

*'Yeah cause you don't waste so much energy trying to convince them, I find that with activism in DC you're either talking to people who don't know what's going on or need to be convinced, and here people are on board, they just need to get plugged in and you just need to convince them to work for YOU.'*

Nevertheless, Lieter's (2001) concept of a 'monetary ecosystem' is supported by the IPA evidence presented here that alternative cultural networks are selected and reproduced by members who aim to gain recognition within a specific cultural community (Sleebos et al.,

2006). Within these alternative cultures, community-economic initiatives are established and maintained by individuals who, as Annette states, look to 'organise and have an effect', and thereby become recognised within a community that furthers their ethical agenda.

It may be argued that sustainable communities are formed and maintained through the processes of social categorisation and identification outlined in Chapter Two. Translating and replicating these models in different cultural contexts would therefore need to account for these identity processes (Turner et al., 1987; Kennedy, 2011). For example, developing mutual credit initiatives within 'mainstream' Western contexts would need to involve new types of conspicuous consumption and places to meet that engage with the styles and values of 'mainstream' identities in order to encourage participation in sustainable practices among such groups (Horton, 2006). However, members of Bristol LETS, Lammas and the DCTB were found to collectively identify with alternative rather than 'mainstream' cultural groups.

#### **4.3 Implications for the study of Environmental Behaviour Change**

This section aims to outline the overall contribution of this study to the field of environmental psychology. As noted in Chapter Two, rational choice models have been favoured within this field of inquiry as they promote cost-effective policy responses, despite being poor predictors of behaviour (Hobson, 2004; Shove, 2010). However, more recent debates have focussed on the extent to which sustainable or pro-environmental behaviour change is within the capacity of individual agents, with scholars such as Maniates (2001) and Shove (2003) suggesting that sustainability requires more fundamental structural changes in society, and in the way we live.

The failure of mainstream psychological models to inform policies that result in widespread behaviour change among individual consumers highlights the need for collective, community-based research into pro-environmental practices (Verplanken, ISEE 2011; DEFRA, 2008). In response to this, the current investigation contributes towards the study of environmental behaviour change by locating pro-environmental practices within grassroots initiatives. Looking at sustainable practices through a collective group lens illuminates the way in which these alternative ideologies are reproduced through social identity positioning (Chapter Nine). Group membership was also shown to support alternative identity construction and the rejection of mainstream cultural influences. Using IPA to investigate what is meaningful to group members has contributed towards a better understanding of the social motivations that initiate and maintain pro-environmental

practices, such as the motivation to conform to group norms as well as volunteer time and resources to group maintenance in order to be accepted and respected within the group.

The second contribution of this investigation to the study of environmental behaviour change is its focus on socio-economic practices. As noted previously, unsustainable behaviours are often influenced by financial scarcity or time scarcity as a result of full-time employment, pointing to a link between economic behaviour and unsustainability (Huddart Kennedy, 2015). Although previously neglected in the study of environmental psychology, the current findings highlight the importance of reciprocity in developing alternative economic practices within communities. Rather than being conducted in isolation, all behaviours, including relations between group members, are seen to serve an economic function in society. Acknowledging this supports the investigation of alternative economic practices which, in turn, support more socially resilient and environmentally sustainable ways of living. Much of the literature on social resilience has looked at the ways in which communities might become more resilient to the effects of climate change and resource depletion (Barr and Devine-Wright, 2012). However, this study shows that 'social resilience' is often practiced on an individual level by those wishing to secure their own *personal* resilience by saving money, saving energy or eating healthily. This link contributes towards understanding the personal and economic as well as the ideological motivations for individuals to engage in socially resilient practices.

This study also contributes towards the psychology and organisation of grassroots sustainability initiatives by suggesting that informal reciprocity, over more formal mechanisms of exchange, supports the emotional experience of 'reciprocal interdependence' associated with community group membership (Gregory, 1982). This tendency towards direct, informal reciprocity naturally limits group size and maintains a stable group dynamic, and this, as noted in section five, has implications for the development of applied Timebanking models. The inclusion of Lammas also suggests that moral sentiments may be activated among members through a type of reciprocity that rewards contributions towards environmental rather than social goals. This study therefore takes a pragmatic approach to environmental behaviour change by focussing on developing alternative economic models, and looking at how society might best organise for sustainability at the grassroots.

This IPA analysis was conducted using an iterative approach that oscillated between scrutiny of the literature and of the data. The lines of analysis taken were therefore

situated within a strong theoretical framework and are able to build on current academic literature in psychology. For example, psychological phenomena in Chapters Seven to Nine are congruent with the well supported experiential framework of Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1991). Secondly, organisational processes in the chosen groups support the categorizations suggested by Seyfang and Longhurst (2014) in their prominent and on-going evaluation of grassroots innovations. Within these categories, a large number of concepts were generated from the data, each including a wealth of relevant detail from a range of perspectives on the experience of community sustainability.

The third contribution of this study to environmental psychology is that it offers a socio-psychological evaluation of these alternative community-economic initiatives. This comes in answer to Fahy and Rau's (2013) suggestion that sustainability research methodologies in the social sciences fail to adequately account for how best to measure the success of small-scale initiatives. Unlike the majority of research in environmental psychology, this innovative multi-level approach has practical implications for promoting environmental behaviour change. In particular, it situates this study within an interdisciplinary context, in which psychological insights inform the design of mutual-credit systems. This highlights the potential for environmental psychologists to contribute towards the design and implementation of economic models that support healthier and more sustainable communities. Within the context of increased austerity and the recognition of debt-based issuance as being an unsustainable economic model (Bendell, 2013), this psychological investigation of mutual-credit use and development is both practical and timely.

The unique contribution of this study to community sustainability is that it takes both a multi-level and an interdisciplinary approach to the investigation of these groups, as Newell (2001) states, *'an interdisciplinary interpretation of a text must recognise the systemic as well as the individualistic sources of uniqueness in an author and text'* (Newell, 2001 p.11). Over the course of five Chapters, five different analyses of community group membership were presented. These were an individual psychological, as well as a socio-economic group and cultural analysis, followed by an organisational and systemic 'social movement' analysis. Consequently, this study is able to capture more of the complex reality of these organisations than would be possible within a single discipline or through focussing on a single element of group membership.

The interdisciplinary approach taken here contributes towards a new way of conceptualising community sustainability as an emergent property that is not purely

‘social’, ‘psychological’ or ‘economic’. It argues against the assumption that phenomena can remain within disciplinary boundaries and supposedly distinct physical and social domains (De Landa, 2002). Rather, this study draws on disciplinary perspectives and ‘integrates their insights through construction of a more comprehensive perspective’ (Newell and Klein, 1997 pp. 393-394). For example, an interdisciplinary research question may be ‘what are the connections between the social and economic sub-systems in the study of environmental behaviour change?’ This study looks at the phenomenon of exchange within community-economic initiatives in order to examine the linkages between these sub-systems in an ecologically valid setting rather than using abstract theory. Systems theory, which is becoming increasingly popular but is not well applied to community sustainability, validates this process by conceiving of such sub-systems as existing within a larger system, a reality which is captured in the current study. The result is an integrated understanding of membership within community-economic initiatives as a coherent but evolving phenomenon that exists and may be analysed on multiple levels (Urry, 2005).

Locating this study within an interdisciplinary space not only conceptualises sustainability as being emergent and created from the grassroots, but also as consisting of networked social movements operating across the globe. In order to analyse these multiple scales of organisation, the approach taken here not only engages between the academic disciplines, but also involves a dialogical engagement with practitioners within the initiatives and social movements studied. In this way, through presenting a more holistic analysis, the current study diverges from traditional approaches to investigating the organisation and psychology of community sustainability.

## **5. Strengths, Limitations and Challenges**

Following the preceding findings and implications, this section reflects on the strengths and weaknesses of the research methodology, and implications for the conclusions that can be drawn from the methods used. It also considers the challenges of working across disciplinary boundaries. This section first builds on the methodology introduced in Chapter Five by evaluating the methods in light of the research findings. This begins with some reflections on undertaking interdisciplinary research of this type. Second, the strengths and limitations of IPA, secondary data analysis and the use of a multi-level approach are discussed before outlining various considerations in the interpretation of these findings.

## 5.1 Interdisciplinarity

First, this research study was conducted by a single independent researcher working across disciplinary boundaries. However, much interdisciplinary research in the field of sustainability is undertaken by teams of researchers combining expertise from multiple disciplines. As such, Aboelela *et al.* (2007) describe interdisciplinarity as research being undertaken by scholars from two or more distinct scientific disciplines. In order to distinguish interdisciplinarity from multidisciplinary research, the perspectives, skills and theoretical frameworks of the various disciplines must also be integrated.

This was achieved by the author through extensive training in interdisciplinary research and through considerable engagement with current debates within the literature of multiple disciplines. First, the author completed a Bachelor of Science in Psychology and so this field formed the disciplinary foundation of the study, informing the literature presented in Chapter Two as well as the psychological analysis of the interview data using IPA. Second, engagement with the literature and debates in sociology, politics, international relations, geography and the environmental sciences was the foundation of an MRes and PhD in 'Environment, Energy and Resilience', an interdisciplinary course undertaken by the author at Bath, Bristol and Exeter Universities through the ESRC. This included guest lectures by the University of Bath's 'Institute for Sustainable Energy and the Environment', where the materials and perspectives of multiple disciplines were made accessible and analysed as part of the course.

Training in the practicalities of conducting interdisciplinary and mixed-methods research was also undertaken by the author. This included a course in 'Mixed Methods Research' undertaken as part of the MRes qualification and an advanced training course in 'Interdisciplinarity' provided by the South West Doctoral Training Centre. Training was also undertaken at the South West Doctoral Training Centre in 'The Legal Landscapes of Sharing Economies' and in 'Creative Community Economies', providing an interdisciplinary grounding in the legal, regulatory and social policy contexts in which community-economic initiatives operate.

With this background, an interdisciplinary approach was taken in conducting and writing up this research. This included the review of literature from multiple disciplines, conversations with sustainability researchers working in a variety of fields, and regular presentations at multi-disciplinary conferences and seminars. Supervisory meetings were also held at the University of Exeter, where much appreciated methodological feedback was given by

Stewart Barr, a Professor of Geography and second supervisor. These interactions illuminated some Geographical considerations such as the emergence of these initiatives as 'new social movements' and the contextual implications of this for sustainability transitions more broadly.

Extensive engagement with the emerging literature on monetary innovation and complementary currencies was undertaken, contributing to the literature presented in Chapter Three. This emerging field of research, evident in the *International Journal of Community Currency Research*, for example, has been developed by academics and practitioners working in a purely 'transdisciplinary' space. While interdisciplinary research enables the transference of knowledge from one discipline to another, 'transdisciplinarity' involves altering discipline-specific approaches, sharing resources and integrating disciplines to achieve a common scientific goal (Rosenfield 1992).

The goal of developing a 'New Economic Paradigm' has formed this emerging transdisciplinary space, in which practitioner experience is valued equally to the theoretical insights of academia, and where a pragmatic point of view acknowledges the utility of each method in illuminating different domains. This approach focuses on applied 'lines of action', and in doing so, subsumes the differences between disciplines beneath a focus on their similarities, usefulness, and appropriateness in addressing practical social problems (Felizer, 2010). This pragmatic approach to problem solving influenced the interdisciplinary analyses presented in Chapters Seven to Nine as well as the organisational and systemic analyses presented in Chapters Ten and Eleven. Together these chapters contribute towards understanding the complexities of the whole phenomenon of participation in community-economic initiatives, rather than any single element of it.

The major benefit of this novel interdisciplinary study of sustainable community-economic initiatives, comprising two complementary Research Questions, is that it is able to capture a broader perspective of the management and organisation of the groups than would be captured through a simple psychological analysis of group members' pro-environmental behaviour. The addition of sociological analyses captures the relations between individuals and how they work effectively together in groups. These insights may not be captured in an analysis which focuses only on the effects of such relations upon individuals, that is, how group membership is experienced psychologically by individual group members.

Importantly, the addition of Research Question Two acknowledges 'the organisation' as a functional unit of analysis for community sustainability research. The aim of Research



Question Two, to investigate successful and unsuccessful organisational practices, supplements research on individuals' pro-environmental behaviour by capturing the social, organisational and physical contexts in which individuals conduct such behaviour. Through this interdisciplinary, multi-level approach, this study therefore aims to have practical implications for the management of sustainability initiatives, bringing to light the question of whether sustainability research in the social sciences can be value-free, an issue that was addressed in Part Two.

This multi-level study of groups is also necessarily mixed-methods. Analysing organisation documents alongside interview data and established literature provides additional benefits to the study of sustainability groups by gaining insight into group processes and contexts. This included factors influencing the initiation, maintenance and contraction of the selected groups, as well as their replication, translation and scaling-up. This broad analysis provides insight into the diffusion of the social movements themselves, bringing the organisations and members' experiences to light by capturing the aims and objectives that develop the organisations and social movements in question. This comprehensive account is argued to provide a more accurate portrayal of group members' complex experiences and avoids misinterpreting them as static or out of context, as may occur in studies limited to a single discipline.

For researchers aiming to conduct this type of interdisciplinary research in the field of sustainability, the first recommendation would be to take a non-linear approach, working backward from the phenomenon of study (e.g. the groups) and forward from the disciplines used (e.g. psychology, sociology and economics). The proposed theory is tested, revised and re-tested against disciplinary insights and the phenomena studied. For independent researchers working across disciplinary boundaries, it is important to conduct extensive literature reviews equally within the relevant disciplines so as to avoid missing important issues and debates that may inform the analyses. Theoretical insights that may be easily identified by a discipline-specific department or team should also be grasped by the interdisciplinary researcher, which may involve seeking advice and knowledge from other departments and research communities, for example by joining online forums such as CCRsearch.

When conducting a multi-level organisational analysis such as this, it is important to focus on the issue or topic of analysis rather than being constrained by disciplinary perspectives such as 'the psychology of members', 'the sociology of group relations', 'the economics of

sustainable community groups’ or ‘the functioning of social systems’. Each of these perspectives should be one part of an overall approach to capturing and representing the social group in question. This involves full immersion in the topic of analysis with the objective of fully understanding the functioning of the group to meet its objectives for sustainability.

In writing up, the use of terminology should be understandable to students of each of the disciplines contributing to the study, and be consistent with the interdisciplinary field. This may be achieved by careful literature reviews, taking an iterative approach to analysis and carefully negotiating the terminology used. The assumptions of one discipline may also be scrutinized through other disciplinary lenses. For example, when environmental behaviour change is examined from an economic perspective, the assumption of unlimited growth becomes evident, as outlined in Chapter Three. Through integrating perspectives in this way, the write up should aim to achieve a more unified and coherent understanding of the phenomenon (for example, membership within community-economic initiatives) as being at once physical, biological, economic, social, political and functional. Although this understanding is grounded in disciplinary insights, it is qualitatively different (Sharp, 2015).

However, as the disciplines are integrated in the writing-up phase, ‘epistemological tension’ (Jones and Macdonald, 2007) and ‘epistemological pluralism’ (Repko, 2008) can cause conflict in the choice of language and terminology used. For example in the current study, tension was experienced between the bio-psychological and sociological perspective when interpreting group members’ motivations. These concerns were discussed in supervisory meetings as they arose, and rather than describing members’ motivations in terms of bio-psychological drives and needs, the data was interpreted from a more balanced, interdisciplinary socio-psychological perspective. Care was therefore taken to ensure consistency between the language used when interpreting the findings, the evidence supporting the interpretations, and the disciplinary context from which the interpretations arose. This resulted in a final thesis that integrates multiple disciplines in a practical analysis of community-economic initiatives that is both deep and context-dependent.

It should, however, be noted that the interdisciplinary approach taken in this study is only one of several potential approaches to combining disciplinary perspectives in order to arrive at a more comprehensive perspective of this phenomenon. The limitation of this approach is that it may fail to account for the aspects of group membership which may be

easily captured through a different lens. Another approach might be to draw more extensively on the literature in geography, politics and international relations to present a geo-political analysis of these organisations and their potential in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (Smith et al., *forthcoming*). While such a study would have high impact at an international level, such an approach would fail to learn from the nuanced socio-psychological socio-economic experiences of individual group members. Indeed, the multi-level perspective achieved through combining the insights of psychology, sociology and economics is the unique contribution of this research to the study of community sustainability.

## **5.2 Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis**

This section moves on to discuss the strengths, limitations and challenges of applying Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis in this study. The first challenge of IPA is the extent to which the findings can truly and accurately reflect the phenomenological experiences of interviewees. These experiences ranged from simple 'pre-reflexive reflections', such as Leanne's descriptions of her daily chores, to 'attentive reflections on the pre-reflective', for example, her description of 'standing in Tesco's buying some carrots...and thinking, this is mad, I want somewhere to grow my carrots', to 'deliberate controlled reflections' such as her description of the way she feels inseparable from nature and time, 'part of the process' (Smith *et al.*, 2009). The analyses presented in Chapters Seven to Nine described and interpreted all three levels of phenomenological experience, but because of the double hermeneutic that occurs in IPA research, where the researcher tries to make sense of the participant making sense of x, group members' reflections on their more significant experiences such as their motivations, values and life goals may be subject to greater misinterpretation. However, as noted in Chapter Five, extensive reflection accompanied any general interpretations, as the analysis progressed in an iterative manner between interpretation and reflection in a research diary.

During the writing-up phase, care was also taken to ensure that interpretations were representative of participants' experiences as they were described in interview. More decisive statements were made when interpreting the meaning of pre-reflective mundane experiences as they were recounted, but only tentative statements were made when interpreting the meaning of experiences that involved a greater amount of interpretation by interviewees.

Reflective analysis also involved taking into consideration my own age, gender and social status as factors that could potentially impact the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis presented here. For example, my status as a young woman may have influenced participants' responses during interview. Had the author of this study been a male of an advanced age with a low socio-economic status it could be assumed that the questions and framing of the answers would differ slightly, perhaps leading to slightly different conclusions. As it is, the intention of some group members may have been to enhance their group status in relation to their perception of my relative status. Group leaders may have also described the management and functioning of the initiatives differently to me than they would have done to an older interviewer, leading to different insights and conclusions.

With this understanding, reflection upon my own impact as a researcher on interviewees discourses as well as on my own phenomenological interpretations helped to interpret interview transcripts as well as, 'distinguish between what the respondent said and the analyst's interpretation or account of this' (Conrad, 1987, p. 15). Re-reading and re-analysing the transcripts further helped to determine whether interpretations stemmed directly from the interviewee and how they may have been influenced, or whether they were artificially constructed to support my prior assumptions and demographic biases (outlined in Chapter Five), or the developing theory. For example, differences observed between Bristol LETS and DCTB members were initially attributed to cultural and socio-economic factors in line with the developing theory, before subsequent reflection and analysis accounted for demographic differences between the groups, for example, age differences, as also contributing to the different motivations and level of agency expressed by these groups.

Field observations of interview settings and group meetings also gave clues that further informed and substantiated the interpretation of more ambiguous meanings. For example, although income was not disclosed, such observations were cross-referenced against interview data to provide a tentative analysis of socio-economic status. An example of these notes is included below:

*16/01/2014 Interview with Tao at Lammas-*

*On arrival at Lammas, the site appeared rather quiet and peaceful. I glimpsed a couple in their house, and said hello to a middle aged person on the path. Tao's house is located on the highest point of the eco-village site, offering a view over the other smallholdings. His is also the largest of the houses, with a barn-like structure. The others are round-houses, including the central community hub. A man was chopping wood outside Tao's house, and during the interview another visitor arrived. This evidence of community help was, however*

*not corroborated by Leanne, so perhaps was evidence of members trying to carry favour. The house was rustic, included a gas stove and appliances. There were symbols of Buddhism including the 'Om'. On leaving the house, I was greeted by the daughter who seemed very friendly and confident. Later I saw the son jogging past, he also greeted me confidently.*

*16/01/2014 Interview with Dave at LAMMAS-*

*I met Dave on the path. He was dressed in conventional outdoor wear and carried a large wooden stick. He also approached another man on the path and despite not being a Lammas member, showed involvement in the community. Dave's keenness to show support for Lammas should be taken into account.*

*14/01/2014 Interview with Dave at Bristol LETS-*

*Dave is a retired teacher, who is keen to maintain his social networks and professionalism. He is intelligent and has a keen philosophical interest in LETS and similar models of community exchange. He lives in a terraced house in Southville and has a lodger. He states that he is 'used to living on next to no money'. He is wearing outdoorsy natural coloured clothes. He describes LETS members as eccentric but his house does not seem overly eccentric in character.*

These observations of Lammas provided useful data to corroborate statements. For example, the size and position of Tao's house in relation to the other plots reinforces a sense of his leadership role and corroborates residents' statements about the nature of the social dynamic within Lammas. Observations of Dave's manner and attire at Lammas and of Dave's house in Southville also provided supplementary information that verified their self-descriptions. In this way, field notes allowed interview data to be cross-referenced, thereby reducing the risk of misinterpretation. Importantly, given the limitations as to what can be discerned from any situation and the risk of misinterpretation, these notes did not form a core component of the analysis. Furthermore, on the whole field observations were not found to contradict participants' discourses and instead verified the truthfulness of statements made during interview.

Another consideration of this study is the theoretical transferability of the findings to other groups and contexts. IPA's in-depth analysis of the phenomenological experiences of this sample (n=15) limits its generalizability in favour of a richer depth of analysis (Smith *et al.*, 2009). While it would have been impossible to interview every member of the chosen initiatives, five participants were purposefully selected from each initiative to reflect a range of personal experiences within each group including both males and females, young and old members and new and long-standing members. Smith *et al.* (2009) advise researchers to find a 'fairly homogenous sample', however Pringle *et al.* (2011) argue that too narrow a sample may make the readers' judgements about transferability and links to other groups and contexts more difficult to make. The balanced sample chosen for this

study, and the rigorous methods used to distil members' personal experiences into a 'general' experience means that theoretical transferability is likely to be strong.

A second point to make with regard to the sample is that, despite seeking to capture examples of convergence between group members' experiences (Giorgi, 2008), examples of divergence were also present within the data. For example, Leanne's experience of life at Lammas differed substantially from Tao's and differences were also acknowledged between Karaline and Annette's participation in Bristol LETS. A limitation may be that the focus on commonalities between group members' experiences downplayed individual differences between them (Smith *et al.*, 2009). As highlighted above, care was taken during the analytical phase to draw out any points of divergence and fully interpret them, which added to the richness of the analysis. For example, Karaline and Annette's differing experiences were found to stem from the same drive for personal resilience, while Leanne and Tao's differing experiences result from their differing understanding and desire for community connection. These rich analyses finally pointed to the importance of conflict resolution methods as a community-building practice. It was also discovered that variation in the group goal influences to some extent the degree and nature of reciprocal exchange and community-building practice among members. These examples demonstrate how points of divergence between the groups added valuable insights that contributed towards theory development. Notably, the chosen initiatives reflect a combination of social, economic and environmental goals and so the extent to which these findings are typical of other community-economic initiatives would depend on the goals and focus of the organisation in question.

A final limitation of the IPA methodology is that the quality of the analyses in this respect depends on the quality of the interview and of the data collected (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Despite the careful design of the fieldwork and considerable research into the methods of IPA interviewing, challenges were inevitably encountered during data collection. However, as the interviews progressed, my skills in IPA interviewing improved, leading to richer phenomenological insights. Attempts were also made throughout the interviewing process to build rapport through language and appearance: by dressing in a casual and demure way and using a friendly, non-judgemental tone. Questions were limited to those on the interview schedule and only included prompts when participants began to draw on experiences that were meaningful outside of the schedule.

### **5.3 Secondary Data Analysis**

The second part of this study, Chapters Ten and Eleven involved the analysis of a wide range of secondary data sources. These data were used in conjunction with primary interview data from Research Question One to provide systemic analyses of the chosen organisations. However, a limitation in using this wide range of data sources is that some of the information, having been collected to answer a different research question or objectives, may have been taken out of context, leaving it inappropriate to the current study (Denscombe, 2007). This risk was avoided, however, by only drawing on data that was highly relevant to the selected organisations. A second limitation of this approach is a lack of control over data quality (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, where possible, data was taken directly from Government and other official institutions, respected journals and websites that were affiliated to the groups so as to guarantee the quality and reliability of the data.

A major benefit of secondary data analysis in this study, as highlighted in section four of this chapter, was that the use of a multi-level approach allows the findings to inform and validate each other. For example, LETS members preference for direct reciprocity and their experience of forgetting to record their Hours online validates the critique of formal exchange processes using organisational data presented in Chapter Ten. As highlighted previously, this data triangulation not only adds validity to the findings but also illuminates the processes by which personal experience relates to group processes, as well as how group structures are experienced by members. Casey and Murphy (2009) argue that using more than one method of data collection can improve triangulation by adding to the completeness of the data as well as enhancing the findings. However, an improvement to the triangulation of this study could have been to pair the IPA analyses with an evaluation of the social, economic and environmental impact of each organisation. This would have increased the usefulness of the research to the organisations studied, although time and resource limits meant that this was not possible.

### **5.4 Evaluation of Findings**

Turning to an evaluation of the findings of this thesis, a factor to consider is their transferability to other contexts. Psychological phenomena outlined in Chapters Seven to Nine were applicable to members across all three organisations, indicating transferability to members belonging to similar groups. For example, phenomena such as the 'personal resilience', 'community connection' and the 'active selection of culture' were applicable to

all members, and Chapters Seven to Nine are structured around these general themes. Group differences, for example in the experience of personal resilience in Chapter Seven, were of degree not of kind, and where divergences between groups were found, these were analysed in relation to the literature. For example, different group experiences of personal resilience were analysed with regard to structural factors such as the rural location of Lammas compared to Bristol LETS and the DCTB. These differences, for example, support the call by Social Practice Theorists for more structural changes in society to support pro-environmental behaviour change (Maniates, 2001; Shove, 2003).

The application of these findings to groups across the world would also need to consider the ethnicity and the belief systems of members. For example, 'community connection' and the 'active selection of culture' would have different connotations in African and Far Eastern countries. The translation of group structures and processes to an American or European environment would also cause the organisation to change depending on the social support structures within in the host country. Due to these contextual differences, transferable phenomena such as 'personal resilience' would have differing effects at a group level within other initiatives. Indeed, the role of phenomena such as 'personal resilience' and 'informal reciprocity' in the development of other community-economic initiatives would depend on work done within those initiatives and how these phenomena are experienced by group members. However, these findings usefully informed the organisational analyses presented in Chapters Ten and Eleven and may be applied as a useful framework for future case study research into community-economic initiative of this kind.

Another consideration is the impact of these findings in relation to the broader Sustainable Development Agenda outlined by the United Nations in September 2015. The current findings suggest that the social approach to sustainability promoted by the DCTB, and the mortgage-free off-grid life promoted by Lammas, may be most readily accepted within radical, marginalised and disadvantaged communities. The suggestion that LETS schemes exist in areas where there is a high density of green, post-materialist, middle class members (Aldridge and Patterson, 2002), also risks marginalising other socio-economic groups. The question posed here is, how applicable might these grassroots models be to the transformation of mainstream society?

In terms of a 'revolutionary movement' for social change, this study is informed by the gradual reduction in conventional activist responses to environmental problems, such as



direct protest (Roberts, 2011). Equally, Government attempts to achieve sustainable development goals through engaging citizen-consumers have shown to be ineffective (Barr *et al.* 2011). Rather, the global LETS, Timebanks and Ecovillage networks represent what may be seen as the emergence of a new form of environmental activism which is neither characterised by the politics of protest nor by individual consumption choices. In response to environmental concerns, this pragmatic organisation of sustainability from the grassroots is what Bailey *et al.* (2011) have termed the 're-localisation' agenda. Equally, the global prevalence of these movements is a major strength in light of 'the growing complexity of global flows of people, goods, waste products and ideas and their capacity to transcend national boundaries' (Fahy and Rau, 2013, p.6).

Finally, this multi-level study enables us to better understand the motivations for individuals to engage in socially resilient practices, which may be to enhance their personal resilience. In an increasingly value-driven society, participation within these community-economic initiatives is also found to be meaningful to individuals because it confers social identity and enhances self-esteem through the interplay of personal and group identity (Jenkins, 1998). In making a selection about which communities to identify with, individuals contribute to the production and reproduction of those collectivities on a national and international scale (De Anca, 2012). Particularly in Western consumer societies, disenfranchisement, along with a growing critique of the mainstream economy and its negative social and environmental consequences may result in these initiatives, along with their wider movements, being a promising avenue for research and development in sustainability.

## **6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this work makes a valuable theoretical contribution to the investigation of membership within sustainable community-economic groups. Findings that emerged from this study add to the interdisciplinary field of sustainability research in the social sciences. In particular, it emphasises the continued investigation and development of intrinsic motivation, alternative leadership practices and informal reciprocal exchange at the grassroots. In suggesting these novel topics as potential lines of inquiry, it is hoped that this study will contribute to the literature on sustainability as well as towards the growing interdisciplinary field of complementary currencies and grassroots innovation; an area which is only recently emerging and is still largely facilitated by practitioners working within the movement.

By adopting an innovative multi-level approach to IPA, this study helps to move forward methodological debates on the use of IPA to study group experiences. This is a novel approach to the study of these groups, and the insights provided by its dual-perspective in determining the relationship between member experiences and group processes, is argued to be a valuable contribution to further case study investigations of this kind.

Initial reviews of the literature revealed that significant contributions could be made to the study of environmental behaviour change by pursuing an investigation of collective group processes and structures in sustainability. In doing so, this study diverges from the majority of psychological research that focuses on the daily practice of individuals. In contrast to the disciplinary approach still widely adopted in psychology, the interdisciplinary approach taken in this study, linking socio-psychological and socio-economic theories, was an important aspect guiding the research process from the design of the questions and methodology through the data collection procedure, to the analysis and discussions.

This was first an inductive study of motivations and experiences. The rich IPA analysis presented here supplements quantitative psychological research in this field. As a result, these phenomenological insights shed light on the deeper motivations and interests of individuals. Second, this was a study of collective community-based approaches, acknowledging the need for a multi-level analysis that not only looks at individual experiences but also observes reciprocal group processes and the way values and practices are learned within emerging communities of practice. Third, this study investigated practical alternative economic solutions. This comes in response to the communities already conducting these alternative practices as social experiments in sustainable living. The practical, multi-level approach taken here acknowledges that social, economic and environmental sustainability requires urgent, holistic changes in the way people live. Finally, the themes revealed in this study are shown to be theoretically transferable to other group contexts, providing a useful framework for future case study research into the evaluation of community-economic initiatives. Not only does this framework determine how the psychological experiences of members eventually shape group-level outcomes, but also demonstrates how group structures and processes can be better designed by accounting for the individual experiences of members. It is hoped that from this multi-level interdisciplinary perspective, new research and development in the field of community sustainability might emerge.

## Appendix One: Bibliography

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## Appendix Two: Ethics Form

### *Purpose of the project and a brief rationale*

This study will investigate a selection of creative community-economic initiatives: an Ecovillage, a Time bank and a Local Exchange Trading Scheme. I propose that the above mutual aid networks may provide the social participation and reciprocal exchange necessary to enable otherwise socially excluded groups to engage in the moral values and practices of Ecological Citizenship and thus work towards more sustainable livelihoods (Dobson, 2003).

The first part of the study aims to determine whether group membership is related to the socialization of Ecological Citizenship among members. This will be investigated through discourse analytic methods, drawing on data transcribed from semi-structured interviews with group and community members.

Secondly, I will take a participatory action research approach, working collaboratively with group members to develop a particular area of the organisation or to solve a problem presented by the group. This part of the research study therefore remains relatively open and exploratory, drawing less on theoretical foundations and more on practical knowledge originating within the organisations (Selener, 1996). However, Ostrom's (1990) core design principles for successfully organizing to manage common-pool resources will provide some guidance in identifying and comparing group structures and processes within the organisations.

The intention of this research is therefore not only to explore the psychology of group members on an individual level, but also to inform the improvement of groups on an organisational level. I propose that both levels of analysis are required in order to successfully account for Ecological Citizenship within groups, and for practically informing the conditions that will most successfully nurture its existence within society.

### *Brief description of methods and measurements*

This multi-level study takes a case-based approach to investigating community initiatives where Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) will be adopted as the methodology.

From the 'entry' phase of the research study, all parties will get to know one another, build trust and make their assumptions and expectations clear in order to establish a collaborative working relationship. Participants will be briefed about the research process and group members will participate actively in discussions about how to implement data collection methods.

During the data collection phase, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with group members to assess their values and practices relating to Ecological Citizenship. The impact of the group/project and other factors in the formation of these values will be assessed. This data will be analysed using IPA in relation to the first primary research question.

Data regarding the groups' activities, processes and impacts will be acquired through secondary data collection and participatory observation of events/ meetings. A framework

for data collection has been developed using the CES Planning Triangle and Outcomes Monitoring Framework (Social Audit Network). These tools are used in conducting voluntary sector impact assessments and proved to be effective across the three groups selected for the current pilot study.

Data will be transcribed and analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods where appropriate. The organisational structure and processes of the selected groups will also be compared to Ostrom's core design principles in order to determine areas of success and possible improvement among groups promoting Ecological Citizenship.

In the feedback phase, I will share results with the organisations to obtain feedback. This is hoped to result in further exploration of particular areas for improvement. This process will be documented to enable transparency and accountability, while ensuring that strategies remain valid and adaptive to change.

*Participants; recruitment methods, number, age, sex/gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria.*

Groups were selected on a purposive sampling basis. Contact has been made with representatives from all three organisations (Lammas Ecovillage, Bath LETS and Dane County Time bank) and each has expressed interest in collaborating on the research study. The inclusion of Dane County Timebank operating in Madison, Wisconsin, in the United States will offer a cross-cultural perspective. Access to this group was gained through contact with its founder, Stephanie Rearick. An overseas fieldwork expenses grant of £644 was awarded and this will be used to cover travel costs.

Participants are group members who will be both long-standing and recently joined or affiliated members. These will be selected through opportunity sampling methods.

*Consent and participant information, arrangements for debriefing.*

Prior to taking part in the study, each group will receive a covering letter detailing the purpose of the study, outlining the methods of data collection and what their group might expect to gain from participating. The information sheet will also explain the nature of participatory action research. Please see the attached form.

Full written consent will be given by each interviewee prior to their interview. They will be given the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time and will be informed that their data will be kept confidentially by the University of Bath. Please find a copy of the consent form attached.

A copy of the group report will be sent to a representative and to each participating interviewee. Participants will have the opportunity to review the document and confirm that an accurate representation of their data has been produced. They may request that their contribution is excluded from the report or that it is anonymised. Written consent will be provided by a representative from each group before submission of the Thesis.

### *Statement of Ethical Considerations*

The primary ethical consideration raised by this project involves the reputation of the three organisations in question, and potentially unanticipated consequences of conducting the IPA research. I will ensure that the data presented in the individual reports and thesis chapters are verified by the organisations and that each group gives full written consent prior to submission of the Thesis. Secondly, during the 'feedback' phase, consideration will be given to the implications of the findings to the groups in question.

A second ethical consideration is the use of secondary data. Full written consent to access data already collected by the organisation will be gained prior to conducting the study. Please see the attached forms. Data collection will also be conducted in close consultation with the groups as per the methodology of IPA. Finally, groups will have the opportunity to review the final reports.

### *Start and duration of the project*

The project is estimated to commence on 1 January 2014 and data collection, analysis and action implementation is expected to continue for a duration of six months until the end of June 2014.

### Appendix Three: Ethical Approval Email

*Email dated: 9th December 2013*

Dear Carmen

Reference Number 13-199

Thank you for attending to those amendments. I can now confirm that you have full ethical approval.

Best wishes with your research.

Dr Helen Lucey  
Chair Psychology Ethics Committee

## Appendix Four: Information Sheet for Participants



### **Information Sheet**

**University of Bath  
Department of Psychology  
Claverton Down  
Bath  
BA2 7AY**

**Re: Carmen Smith  
Postgraduate research student  
Community-economic initiatives: The Psychology and Organisation of Grassroots  
Sustainability**

The University of Bath is conducting a research study on the role of creative community-economic initiatives in creating sustainable and resilient communities. To this end, a postgraduate researcher (Carmen Smith) will interview group members about their experiences, conduct field observations and participate in some group meetings and activities. She has professional experience working within the voluntary sector and has volunteered with environmental groups such as the Avon Wildlife Trust.

This research study is a collaborative venture in which all participants are equal as co-researchers. Through this research I hope to inform a particular area of your organisation or a problem that is presented by yourselves. During the 'feedback' phase of the study it is hoped that the findings will inform some real improvements to the functioning of your initiative.

Importantly, remember that the data you provide us will be kept anonymously and confidentially at the University of Bath. This data will not be used to influence funding decisions. It will only be used within your organisation and to provide the University with a better insight into the work of community-economic initiatives and their impact.

For further information on any aspects of the research or to request a copy of your transcript please contact me at the above address, by email at [C.J.Smith@bath.ac.uk](mailto:C.J.Smith@bath.ac.uk) or by telephone on 07943880058.

## Appendix Five: Consent Form for Interviewees

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### **Declaration of Informed Consent**

**University of Bath  
Department of Psychology  
Claverton Down  
Bath  
BA2 7AY**

**Re: Carmen Smith  
Postgraduate research student  
Community-economic initiatives: The Psychology and Organisation of Grassroots  
Sustainability**

I hereby agree to participate the above research project and understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, without offering reason for doing so. I understand that my interview will be recorded and that any responses I give will be treated with the utmost discretion. I reserve the right to request participant anonymity and I understand that any information I provide will be used only for the purposes of the above research project.

**Name of participant**

---

**Signature**

---

**Date**

---

The researcher assures all participants in the study that their welfare is paramount at all times in accordance with the British Psychological Society guidelines for fieldwork practice.

When you have completed this form please return it to the researcher. For further information on any aspects of the research or to request a copy of your transcript please contact me at the above address, by email at [C.J.Smith@bath.ac.uk](mailto:C.J.Smith@bath.ac.uk) or by telephone on 07943880058.



## Appendix Six: Consent Form for Group Representatives



### **Declaration of Informed Consent**

**University of Bath  
Department of Psychology  
Claverton Down  
Bath  
BA2 7AY**

**Re: Carmen Smith  
Postgraduate research student  
Community-economic initiatives: The Psychology and Organisation of Grassroots  
Sustainability**

On behalf of my organisation, I hereby agree to participate in the above research project and understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, without offering reason for doing so. I reserve the right to request participant anonymity both before and following review of the final document. I consent to share data collected by my organisation, based on the understanding that any information I provide will be used only for the purposes of the above research project.

**Name of participant**

---

**Signature**

---

**Date**

---

The researcher assures all participants in the study that their welfare is paramount at all times in accordance with the British Psychological Society guidelines for fieldwork practice.

When you have completed this form please return it to the researcher. For further information on any aspects of the research or to request a copy of your transcript please contact me at the above address, by email at C.J.Smith@bath.ac.uk or by telephone on 07943880058.

## Appendix Seven: Interview Schedule

1. Introduction to aims of study and time to build rapport
2. Presentation of information sheet, consent form and dictaphone
3. Time to discuss and ask questions

### 4. Part One

Question One: Can you tell me about how you came to join this group?

- What was the experience/moment?

Question Two: Can you tell me about one of your most memorable experiences with the group?

- What did it mean?

Question Three: Can you tell me about your relationship with other members in the group?

- What do you discuss as a group? Agree, disagree? Shared feelings?
- How are they similar/ different to you?
- How would you describe your role in the group?

Question Four: How would you describe your relationship with your local neighbourhood?

- The people, the environment?
- What places are special to you and why?
- Family? How do you socialise?

Question Five: How do you feel about your group participation in relation to wider contexts and issues?

Question Six: Have your views and feelings changed since joining?

- Do you live differently compared to before?
- What have you learnt from other group members?

Question Seven: What is your vision of the future?

- Ambitions? Dreams?

### 5. Part Two

How is this group organised?

What are the rules of the group?

What happens when somebody doesn't cooperate?

How do you welcome new members to the group?

Can you tell me about the history of the group?

## **Appendix Eight: Transcription Guidelines**

All interviews were recorded on a dictaphone and transcribed using a simple coding strategy adopted from:

Lofland, J., Snow, D. A., Anderson, L. and Lofland, L. H. (2006). *Analysing Social settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*, Fourth Edition, United Kingdom: Thomson Wadsworth.

### **The following transcription conventions were used:**

Pauses are indicated by (.)

Pauses longer than two seconds are indicated by (..)

CAPS LOCK indicates emphasis

All non-verbal aspects of the interview are included in brackets such as (laughter), (looks away).

Changes in tone are indicated in brackets such as (thoughtful), (irritated).

## Appendix Nine: Summary of Findings sent to Interviewees

### Summary of Research Findings

This PhD study aimed to answer two research questions:

1. How do members understand their experience within the selected initiatives?
2. What processes lead to the formation, maintenance and contraction of the initiatives?

Fifteen people were selected for interview from three initiatives: a LETS group, a Timebank and an Eco-village. Interviewees were 8 women and 7 men of different ages. They were long-standing members, and those who had only recently joined or were affiliated with the initiatives. This aimed to provide a wide range of group experiences and perspectives, from which I tried to find common themes. Interviews took place between January and June 2014.

#### *How do members understand their experience within the selected initiatives?*

The most common experience members reported was 'Personal Resilience' or being able to recover quickly from illness, change, or misfortune. This was related to practicing reciprocity e.g. trading in LETS and the Timebank, which results in feelings of empowerment and autonomy. People also reported that this activity satisfies practical needs and values such as living in a manner that is considered to be morally right. Self-efficacy, or 'the belief in one's capabilities' was also an important factor in motivating group members to seek out personal resilience and enhance their wellbeing in practical, economic ways.

The second main reason that interviewees chose to join and continue their membership is the social aspect of group membership: being part of a community. Many people expressed a feeling of nostalgia for a type of community that they no longer feel is present in modern society. All three groups provide a supportive platform over and above individual friendships. This supports members both old and young, and is maintained by their contributions. Different challenges were also faced by each group in negotiating community relations.

Finally, interviewees often expressed their group membership as being part of their participation in 'alternative culture'. Sometimes, this involved selecting alternative media such as certain websites and newspapers or not watching mainstream news. Many co-ordinate or participate in small local events and activities that promote community resilience.

#### *What processes lead to the formation, maintenance and contraction of the initiatives?*

In this research I also looked at the origin and structure of the groups as well as wider contextual factors that might influence them. Although each group differed, the common themes were:

#### *Factors influencing the formation of groups:*

- The initial motivation, vision and experience of the group leader(s)
- The existence of a prior initiative to build upon

- Online materials and training in how to set up an initiative
- Selecting a dynamic combination of people and skills to run a steering team
- The presence of economic need and/or alternative culture in the surrounding area
- The support of 'umbrella' organisations
- Financial support from government or investors

*Factors influencing the maintenance of groups:*

- Developing a sound and transparent legal infrastructure, sometimes influencing policy
- Working to meet the unique needs of group members whether to provide sustenance, companionship or a place to practice sustainability
- All three groups are managed by a Board of Directors or 'core-team' and successful governance was related to fair decision-making and community engagement
- Working with other organisations requires regulation and a shared vision
- Differing priorities: decision-making, community governance or a means of exchange
- Providing training and education to others, engaging with the media
- Technology e.g. a website, digital means of transaction, innovations in sustainable design

*Factors influencing the contraction of groups:*

- Conflicts within the group. Mediation Training tools for resolving conflict through needs-based empathy such as that provided by the Centre for Peaceful Solutions were found to be beneficial in resolving group conflict.
- Developing informal trading relationships so members forget to record transactions online (LETS and TB). This was found to be a natural process but overcome through working with other organisations
- Newer initiatives appealing to other types of people focussing the group on a particular niche. This was not seen as negative as it means that the group can specialise
- Competing with other initiatives for funding and resources. This is found to be overcome by playing a 'connecting' role

*How will I use these findings?*

1. I am aiming to present these findings at three conferences for researchers and practitioners this summer.
2. I am hoping to write two academic articles based on this study (for copies please email me)
3. If any of the findings above may be of help to your group I am happy to discuss developments in more detail. This study is intended as a learning exercise allowing the three initiatives to learn from each other's experiences.
4. **If you would like a pseudonym to be used in the thesis and publications to protect your anonymity please let me know as soon as possible by phone or email. If I receive no response I assume that you would prefer your real name to be used in the study.**

Finally, I would like to say **thank you** to everyone who contributed their time to be interviewed, and especially to the group representatives who have helped this project to succeed. I would be very grateful for any feedback about your interview and any comments you might have about the findings. This is an important part of the research process. Do these findings reflect your experience? Have I missed anything important? If you have anything to add please email me at C.J.Smith@bath.ac.uk or call on (+44) 07943880058.

Carmen Smith (21 April 2015)